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HELPS TO A SPIRITUAL LIFE

HELPS TO A SPIRITUAL LIFE

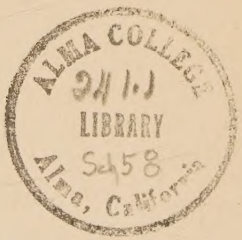
FOR RELIGIOUS AND FOR ALL PERSONS
IN THE WORLD WHO DESIRE TO
SERVE GOD FERVENTLY

FROM THE GERMAN OF

REV. JOSEPH SCHNEIDER, S.J.

WITH ADDITIONS BY

REV. FERREOL GIRARDEY, C.SS.R.



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✝ JOHN M. FARLEY,
Archbishop of New York.

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Notice.

The following little work was compiled and published by Rev. F. Schoenbold from the writings of Rev. Joseph Schneider, S.J., the well-known, learned and pious author of excellent spiritual books. Chapters I., II., and VII. were written for general use, whilst all the other chapters, except those added by the translator, were written by Father Schneider for the benefit of two religious communities, for which he had been charged to compose Rules and Constitutions. The translator, to render the work more complete by the addition of some of the practical asceticism of St. Alphonsus, has added Chapters VIII., IX., X., XX., and XXII.

He takes this opportunity to recommend most earnestly the ascetical works of that great saint and Doctor of the Church, who was as eminent in ascetical science as in Moral Theology, to all who desire to sanctify themselves, whether they be religious or persons living in the world.

THE TRANSLATOR.

HELPS TO A SPIRITUAL LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

A Christian Rule of Life.

SECTION I. GENERAL RULES AND MAXIMS.

1. Thou hast been created to know, praise, honor, and serve God and, by so doing, to save thy immortal soul. Such is thy destiny for time and for eternity. Everything else in this world, all that exists out of and around thee, all that happens to thee, either agreeable or disagreeable, should, in the designs of God, be a help to thee to attain thy end. From this it follows that thou shouldst make use of creatures — taken in the sense given above — only in so far as they may promote the attainment of thy end, and that it behooves thee to

abstain from them whenever they hinder thee from securing thy destiny. In other words, thou shouldst not ask, "Does this agree with my inclinations or gratify my sensuality," but rather, "Will this help me to reach my eternal destiny?" In order, however, to acquire such a frame of mind as will enable thee always to follow and obey this principle, thou shouldst strive to become perfectly indifferent concerning all that surrounds thee, all that happens to thee, so that thou wilt not desire or will health, wealth, honor, a long life, etc., any more than their opposites, so long as the divine will, or the duties of thy state and the exigencies of thy condition, or due charity and justice towards thy fellow-men, do not require thee to give the preference to any one of these. It behooves thee to be indifferent concerning those things that are not in thy power, but are dependent on the wise and loving providence of God, who alone

knows what is best for thee in every particular case. Thou shouldst not wish one thing more than another, but shouldst abandon thyself with childlike confidence and the most perfect conformity of judgment and will to the Lord, inasmuch as thou desirest and choosest that only which is calculated to promote best the end of thy creation. In order to acquire this holy indifference, in which life's only true wisdom consists, thou shouldst often ask thyself and answer these questions: (1) What profit is there in enjoying pleasure and good health during life, if I render myself miserable for all eternity? What harm is there in leading a life of suffering, pain and privations, if I can thereby render myself forever happy? — (2) What will it avail me to be very learned, refined and accomplished, if I do not escape eternal punishment? What will it hurt me to be poor, illiterate and unrefined, if it helps me to acquire ever-

lasting bliss? — (3) What advantage is there in my being honored and esteemed during life, and after death to cast my lot with the reprobate? What harm is there in living in an humble station and in being despised during life, if this promotes and secures my eternal welfare? — (4) What benefit is there in a long but ill-spent life on earth, if it leads to endless misery? What disadvantage is there in dying young, provided by my virtues I secure heaven's ineffable joys?

2. Thou hast only one soul; if it is lost, everything is lost for thee. Thou hast only one God; if thou dost not serve Him, thou servest sin and art a slave of Satan. Thou hast only one Redeemer, Jesus Christ; if thou dost not heed His voice, He will suffer thee to be lost. Thou hast in the next world only one Judge, from whose sentence there is no appeal to a higher tribunal. Thou hast only one

heaven to hope for; if thou art excluded from it, hell will surely be thy portion. Thou shalt die but once, and thou knowest not when, how, or where; and it is this death that shall decide thy eternity — either an eternity of happiness or an eternity of misery. It is then of the utmost importance for thee to strive earnestly and constantly to secure eternal happiness, whilst thou hast time and the means to do so; for the night will come for thee, and perhaps very soon, when thou shalt no longer be able to work for it.

3. God demands not only that we avoid sin, but also the ordinary daily works of which our life is made up.

4. God loves and wishes that we keep order in our daily actions; He wills that we perform them according to the dictates of right reason, and not according to our caprice. "Let all things be done

decently and according to order" (1 Cor. xiv. 40).

5. God requires, moreover, that we perform our actions in a proper manner, and with a pure intention, for He regards rather the manner than the matter of our doings. To be perfectly good, our actions should be performed with a good and pure intention and in the proper manner.

From these general rules and maxims flow the following special rules.

SECTION II. SPECIAL RULES.

1. Rise daily at a fixed hour, resolutely, promptly, devoutly. Resolutely, without excuse or pretext; promptly, without delay; devoutly, amid pious thoughts and aspirations towards God. So begin each day, as if it were the first or the last of thy life. A day will surely come, and perhaps very soon, which will be thy last.

2. If possible, hear Mass daily, with reverence and attention.

With Reverence. Let that which is holy, be holy for thee. Let the Model of thy conduct be Christ offering Himself in the Garden of Gethsemane. His eyes, His hands, His demeanor in prayer represented and promoted His interior devotion. Thy faith and its profession require the same of thee. Be sincerely pious like Abel, and not wicked and hypocritical like Cain.

With Attention. Pay attention to the principal parts of the Mass. Begin like the publican, and at the *Confiteor* say: "O God of goodness and might, be merciful to me, a sinner. I acknowledge my guilt; I bewail it and crave for pardon." At the Offertory offer thy heart to the Lord in sacrifice, exclaiming with David, "O God, despise not an humbled and contrite heart" (Ps. l. 19). At the Elevation of the Sacred

Host ask God with David to create in thee a clean heart. At the Elevation of the Chalice ask God again with David to renew in thee the right spirit, not to take His holy Spirit from thee, but to strengthen thee with a joyful spirit. At the Communion give thyself entirely to the Most High, who gives Himself to thee, and say with St. Augustine: "O Lord, take possession of me, of my eyes, of my ears, hands and feet, of my tongue, of my heart, of my soul, of my whole being. I am all Thine; I will forever remain all Thine." By doing this thou wilt easily banish distractions and restrain the wanderings of thy mind.

3. Pray tranquilly, slowly and reverentially.

Tranquilly. In a place where thou art not exposed to be disturbed or distracted; and at a time when thou art not taken up with cares. Devout prayer is hindered by

the going and coming of people and the multitude of affairs.

Slowly. He who prays performs an important act; hence why should he be in a hurry?

Reverentially. In prayer thou speakest to the Sovereign Lord of the universe.

4. In intercourse be friendly, prudent.

Friendly. A sincere, unaffected friendliness overcomes everything. There is no heart so hard as not to give admittance to a kind word, and to allow itself to be soothed by it. Do not give or take offence, do not get irritated. The hands of all were raised against Ismael, because he raised his hands against all. In many things be blind, deaf and dumb, that thou mayst not disturb the peace and cause quarrels.

Prudent. Do not trust nor mistrust everybody. Neither believe nor discredit everything. Do not praise everything, nor withhold

thy praise from everything. Thou livest among men, and not among angels. Men do not always, but sometimes, deceive; there is sometimes a wolf concealed under a lamb's wool. Be more inclined to explain in good part another's obscure saying than to condemn him. Beware of hastily designating or considering another's actions as sinful; thou shouldst take under thy protection the conscience of thy fellow-man, for it is often good and guiltless in spite of appearances to the contrary. But when thy neighbor's fault is too evident to admit of the excuse of a good intention, thou shouldst still refrain from condemning him, but shouldst ascribe it to the violence of the temptation, which would have overpowered thee equally, or even more shamefully, hadst thou been in his place. Never speak ill of others or well of thyself. To speak at the proper time is an art; but to keep silence at the

proper time is no less an art. Thou hast certainly oftener regretted having spoken than having been silent.

5. Obey promptly, punctually.

Promptly. As if the voice of command came directly from heaven. When thou obeyest a man merely as a man, thou obeyest with difficulty and without merit. But if thou obey him for God's sake, thy obedience becomes pleasant and meritorious.

Punctually. Not superficially; not in appearance or as "serving to the eye" (Col. iii. 22 and Eph. vi. 6). God, who has given the command, sees what thou doest and how thou doest it. Wouldst thou make Him a faulty offering?

6. Recreate thyself honorably, decorously, joyfully.

Honorably. Away, then, with all amusements dangerous to thy soul! Let the company, the kind, the place, the manner of thy

recreation, be select. Flee the secret recesses of sloth and the schools of intemperance and dissipation, and everywhere and always show reverence for thy guardian angel.

Decorously. We should respect one another. Water and earth are clean in themselves, but when mixed together become mud and dirt. Too great familiarity with persons of like sex breeds contempt, and with the other sex begets danger and ruin to modesty, which is the guardian of innocence and virtue.

Joyfully. But within due bounds, and, if possible, within the family circle. Consider recreation as a medicine, and not as a daily food. It may be enjoyed, but not too often, and even then only with moderation, and, as it were, reluctantly. The playing of games is not evil in itself; but to be too greatly absorbed and spend much time therein proves injurious to the soul, since it draws

the soul from serious subjects to trifles. Thou livest not in order to amuse thyself, but thou shouldst amuse thyself in order to live and the better to be able to work.

7. Work and occupy thyself in an orderly manner, earnestly, for the love of God.

In an Orderly Manner. Perform first what is prescribed, and then what is of thy own choice. He who acts thus, does not seek to please himself, but does what is becoming and useful. Order is the royal road by which we may attain our end more directly and more easily.

Earnestly. That is, with due exertion. God sees, assists and rewards thee. This thought should inspire us with courage and diligence. No one sets to work more eagerly than he who directs his view towards God, and considers for whose sake he is laboring and wearing himself out.

For the Love of God. With the intention

to serve and glorify God. Unite also thy sentiments and actions with those of thy divine Saviour, so that what is deficient in thine may be supplied by His infinite merits. In this manner thy most ordinary and most insignificant actions acquire a supernatural worth, become agreeable to God and meritorious to thee unto life eternal.

8. Conquer thyself often, manfully.

Often. Thus wilt thou accustom thyself to self-mastery. Thy eyes, thy ears, thy tongue, thy hands and feet, thy appetite, the passions of anger, love, lust, fear, sadness, love of pleasure, will often assail thee violently and strive to drag thee downwards. But it is only bodies devoid of vital energy that suffer themselves to be thus dragged. The living man resists the impetuous stream. Conquer thyself often in little things, and thou shalt learn to overcome thyself in those that are greater. Deny thyself some-

times that which is lawful, and thou shalt easily deny thyself that which is unlawful.

Manfully. The effeminate are not born to great things. Strength is the result of inurement to exertion. If thou desirest to live long, and especially to live devoutly, do not live effeminately; for he who thus lives and panders to himself does not love God. Bear sufferings and adversity with patience. It is not in thy power to ward off all pain, but it is in thy power to draw great advantages therefrom. In thy sufferings look up to thy Saviour on the cross; complain not, but bear them in silent patience. A cross known to God alone is a great treasure to a Christian soul. If God allows thee to suffer much, consider it as a sign that He wishes to make thee a great saint. Crosses and afflictions are the most precious gifts God imparts to thee in this world, and thy acceptance and patient bearing of them is the

most precious gift thou canst offer Him in this vale of tears.

9. Let thy voluntary devotions be short, cheerful.

Short. If they last long, thou wilt perform them carelessly or soon drop them. The principal thing is not how much thou performest, but with what intention thou actest. A piece of gold is worth many pieces of silver. Fervor and constancy impart great value to short devotions.

Cheerful. That is, freely and without sad constraint, so that thou do not become uneasy when it is advisable to exchange them for some better work, or necessary to omit them entirely. An immovable person is only a human statue. He who is prudent knows how to adapt his resolutions to circumstances.

10. Raise thy heart to God often, sincerely.

Often. At least once every hour raise thy heart to God, for he lives piously and happy who, as much as he can, has his heart constantly near God and God in his heart. What breathing is to the body, that a pious disposition is to the soul; it is refreshing. When leaving thy house, when entering the church, in prosperity and in adversity, in corporal dangers, in spiritual desolation, in difficulties of all kinds, send up a loving aspiration to heaven; it will penetrate the clouds; thy prayer will ascend, and the divine mercy will descend to thee.

Sincerely. Beseech God with thy heart, and not merely with thy lips. If thou wishest to pray well, love God, and manifest thy love to Him in every possible way. No one is so sure to shun evil as he who has thus accustomed himself to unite his actions with love.

11. Receive the sacraments eagerly, becomingly.

Eagerly. Jesus Christ calls thee; the great banquet is ready. Dost thou not hunger after this heavenly food? It is good for the body to fast sometimes, but the soul should be refreshed as often as possible.

Becomingly. Do not appear at holy Communion without the wedding garment, which is a figure of sanctifying grace and devotion. This banquet will, then, always be pleasing and wholesome to thee, and will be a food filling thy soul with heavenly blessings, and not with a curse, and will be to thee, not the stamp of reprobation, but a pledge of eternal glory.

12. Examine thy conscience daily, carefully.

Daily. Because thou sinnest daily. If thou neglected this daily examination, thou wilt easily fall into the habit of sin. Al-

though thou canst not avoid all faults, thou shouldst flee all those that are deliberate, and the proximate occasion and habit of sin. The habit of venial sin ever draws after it a number of great evils.

Carefully. In the evening examine each hour of the day, and thou wilt know thyself and feel sorrow and amend. Thus the night will happily flow by, and a good day will follow, even if thou wert to awaken in another world.

With these means of leading a truly Christian life join daily, if thy occupations permit, a short reading of a book of devotion, or religious instruction, in order to impress deeply on thy mind the divine revelations and good principles, and to assist thee in keeping recollected in the very midst of thy occupations. Among the spiritual books the New Testament, with approved notes and comments, holds the

first place; then the "Following of Christ," the lives of the saints and of holy persons, the ascetical works of St. Francis de Sales and of St. Alphonsus, Goffine, Cochem's or Mueller's "Sacrifice of the Mass," Rodriguez's "Christian Perfection," and other works recommended to thee by thy pastor or confessor. These and other similar works enlighten the mind, inflame the heart, excite to good resolutions, encourage, preserve and strengthen in the practice of virtue. To enjoy these fruits, read with moderation, and be less anxious to read much, than careful as to what and how thou readest. Read attentively, eagerly but slowly, and reflect calmly on what thou readest. Accompany and end thy reading with good resolutions. It was by the reading of spiritual books that St. Ignatius Loyola and many others were induced to lead a holy life. How praiseworthy and

salutary was the ancient custom, now still seen in many places among fervent Catholic families, that the father of the family, especially on Sundays and feast days and during the long winter evenings, would himself read, or have one of the older children read, to his household something edifying and instructive, and then would make appropriate and practical remarks on the reading.

Very wholesome and profitable is the custom of those, who at the end of each month examine themselves on the foregoing principles, purify their conscience by a sincere and contrite confession, and seek fresh strength for the coming month in holy Communion. He who thus spends his days will, at the end of his life, have the consolation of being able to appropriate to himself these words of St. Paul: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. As to the

rest, there is laid up for me a crown of justice, which the Lord, the just Judge, will render to me in that day" (2 Tim. iv. 7, 8).

CHAPTER II.

On Prayer.

Of all possible human occupations and actions prayer is the most sublime, the most noble and the most excellent, for it is a familiar intercourse between God and man. At prayer God speaks to man, and man to God. In prayer we raise our mind and heart to God Himself, the chief Good, in order to honor, adore and love Him, to praise and thank Him, to bewail our sins in His presence, to crave pardon for them, and to express holy resolutions of amendment and fidelity, and, finally, to petition Him for all that is necessary or useful for His glory, and for the temporal and

eternal welfare of ourselves and of our fellow-men. The whole life of the angels and saints in heaven is a constant prayer. The Heart of Jesus, the heart of Mary, the heart of the saints on earth, were continually united to God in prayer. Some men have gone so far in their pride as to assert that in praying man dishonors himself. This is both false and absurd, for it is precisely by prayer that man exalts himself. The voluntary abasement of the heart in prayer, the humility adoring God in love and imploring Him to grant what He is not bound to give, and what He will grant only to prayer, is the very step by which man is enabled to ascend to noble sentiments, to virtue, to the image and likeness of God, who is the true and only source of human greatness. Prayer is the language of our wants, the practical acknowledgment of our dependence on God, the exercise and clear

proof of our religion, the bond uniting us to divine love, the pulsation of religious life and sentiment. The prayerless Christian is a man without God, without religious worship, without religion and without hope. Happy, then, is the soul that wishes to pray and can pray. A thousand times unhappy is he who despises and neglects prayer. As a man prays, so he lives. He lives badly that prays badly; he that prays not at all, lives not humanly, but only vegetates. Prayer is to an uncorrupted heart like a second nature — an imperative and sweet habit. A friend takes pleasure in thinking of his friend, and finds delight in a hearty and confidential talk with him. A good child delights in thinking of his beloved father, and has no difficulty in opening his heart to him. How, then, can it be difficult for a Christian to think of God, his gracious Father, of Jesus Christ, his most

loving Redeemer, to express to Him his feelings of reverence, love and gratitude, and to beseech Him, with childlike and affectionate confidence, to grant him His help and His grace. He who reflects on this will not be astonished at this admonition of St. Paul, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. v. 17).

Prayer is not so difficult as many imagine. A truly Christian soul can surely find no great difficulty in presenting to God in prayer her weakness, her shortcomings, her wants, her desires, her sufferings and trials. Experience tells her loudly enough, that all the efforts of her ingenuity alone cannot console her in her difficulties and afflictions, or enable her to escape the evils that oppress her. Prayer is so easy that, if we so wish, we can always and in all places raise our heart devoutly to God; to do this there is no need of many words or of choice

phrases, for, to converse with God, all that is required is to direct our thoughts to Him, and to speak to Him sincerely and familiarly, and He will listen to us and grant us His favors. And this we can do whenever and wherever and as often as we wish. Nevertheless, the prayers we offer up in church are more pleasing to God. He will there, if we may so speak, listen more attentively to the cry of the afflicted, and will more easily grant our petitions. "My eyes shall be open, and My ears attentive to the prayer of him that shall pray in this place" (2 Paral. vii. 15). The church is specially destined and dedicated to prayer and divine worship: "My house is a house of prayer" (Luke xix. 46). Everything therein raises our affections to God, and our prayers there are strongly supported by those of our fellow-Christians. Another advantage of our churches is that they are "the house of

God," the place where Jesus Christ, through whose merits alone every good thing is imparted to us, dwells personally as God and man in the Sacrament of His love, in order to receive the homages and supplications of His children, and to nourish them with His graces and blessings. Hence the prayers offered up in church are specially salutary and profitable.

In order to raise our thoughts to God and speak to Him sincerely and familiarly and in a way pleasing to Him and useful to ourselves, we should, as the apostles once did, address this petition to Him, "Lord, teach us how to pray" (Luke xi. 1). He will teach us by His example, by His words and by His grace. After His baptism He withdrew into a desert and there spent forty days in prayer. During His ministry He would often, after a day of labor and fatigue, retire to some solitary place to spend the night in

prayer. He prayed on the mount of His transfiguration, before raising Lazarus to life, at the Last Supper, in the garden of olives, on the cross. He told His disciples that "it behooveth always to pray and not to faint" (Luke xviii. 1); "watch ye and pray" (John iv. 2); "ask, and you shall receive" (Mat. vii. 7). He ascended into heaven, as St. Paul writes to the Hebrews, in order to appear before the face of God in our behalf, and "He liveth always, in order to pray for us" (Hebr. vii. 25; Rom. viii. 34).

It is not only a self-evident and expressly and strictly commanded obligation to love God, to offer Him due homage, to thank Him for benefits received, and to crave pardon for the offences committed against Him, and all this is done through prayer, but prayer is also absolutely necessary to all who have attained the use of reason as a means of obtaining the graces necessary

for salvation. For without grace, without the divine assistance, we can do nothing profitable to our salvation: "Without Me," says Jesus Christ, "you can do nothing" (John xv. 5); nay, even the desire of doing good is not our own work, for St. Paul says: "Not that we are sufficient to think anything of ourselves, as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God" (2 Cor. iii. 5). For this we need grace, since we are helpless of ourselves. Without divine grace we cannot have faith, hope and charity, nor repent of our sins, overcome temptation, and avoid sin, discharge our duties in a manner pleasing to God, exercise any Christian virtue, carry our cross, and suffer piously and meritoriously, or keep our resolutions and promises to God, nor, what is of the utmost importance, persevere in good until the end. The most necessary and indispensable means of obtaining all these

graces, in the ordinary dispensation of divine providence, *i.e.*, whenever God does not work a miracle to help us, is prayer. God, indeed, imparts some graces without being asked; among these is the grace of prayer, and the gift of faith, and baptism to infants incapable of praying for it. But, because adults have to obtain salvation by their own coöperation, God has made the granting of further graces dependent on prayer. He wishes to draw more closely to Himself our mind and heart, and render our desires more earnest and ardent, by more deeply impressing upon us our own weakness and helplessness. Hence He bids us pray in these words, "Ask, and you shall receive" (John xvi. 24). Prayer is, then, in the designs of God, the channel, the ordinary means of grace for us. Hence we should consider it as something unusual, extraordinary, accidental, to receive

something without having asked for it, or to find something without seeking it. But since it would be presumptuous and imprudent to depend on chance for our salvation, it behooves us to pray for the necessary graces. The greatest and most important graces, especially the forgiveness of sins and sanctifying grace, are not given to us directly through prayer alone, but through the reception of the sacraments; but without prayer we cannot worthily receive the sacraments, nor appropriate their effects to ourselves, nor perseveringly cooperate with them.

It is contrary to sound reason to say or think that it is superfluous to lay our wants in prayer before God, who, being omniscient, already knows them, and who, being the ineffable Goodness, is ever ready to supply them; for we do not pray merely to inform God of our needs, for "our

Father in heaven knoweth that we have need of all these things" (Mat. vi. 32). Nor do we pray because we doubt His goodness and strive to soften His hard-heartedness by our supplications, for "God loveth us with an everlasting love" (Jer. xxxi. 3), and is far more ready to give to us than we are eager to ask and receive. Nor do we imagine that our prayers will cause divine providence to alter its decrees. But rather we pray, because it is the eternal divine decree that we should through prayer obtain and appropriate those graces and benefits which, out of His eternal love, God has destined for us. Do not men themselves require that he who desires their help should at least mention it to them? And would not he be undeserving of assistance, who would be too proud, too obstinate, too light-minded, to ask for it? There are three principal reasons why we should

receive only through prayer the graces and gifts God has in store for us. First, we, as rational beings, should by prayer acknowledge God as the Giver of all that is good. Secondly, we, as free beings, should by prayer open and prepare our heart to receive grace. Just as in order to see we must open our eyes to the light, as in order to nourish ourselves we must eat our food, so should our soul, by means of prayer, appropriate divine grace to itself. What we have obtained by most earnest and persistent prayer, we esteem more highly and put to greater profit. Finally, aware of the necessity of prayer, we should be induced to keep God always in view, to converse with Him reverently and with childlike confidence, and thereby unite ourselves always more and more closely to Him.

For the very reason that God has imposed prayer as an indispensable obligation

upon us, we should not entertain the least doubt of its power and efficacy. For why would God prescribe prayer, if He did not really intend to grant us what we pray for? Could He be so cruel as to excite us to hope for favors, and at the same time deceive us? Could He be so hard-hearted as to refuse and withhold the very things He commands us to ask of Him? The clear, express and solemn words of our divine Saviour leave us no room for doubt on this subject: "Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you. Therefore I say unto you: all things, whatsoever you ask when you pray, believe that you shall receive, and they shall come unto you. Amen, amen, I say unto you: if you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it to you" (Mat. vii. 7; Mark xi. 24; John xvi. 23). Our Lord makes no excep-

tion either as to the person asking, or as to the thing asked. After this solemn assurance of our Saviour, we no longer have to rely merely on the free divine goodness to obtain from God all that we pray for, but also on the divine veracity and fidelity, which cannot possibly fail. Moreover, since our divine Redeemer, as the apostle teaches, prays for us in heaven as our Mediator, and the Holy Ghost in us supports our prayers "by ineffable groanings," and since the Most Blessed Virgin Mary adds her powerful intercession for us, and our glorified brethren in heaven cause their influence with God to be felt in our behalf, and the prayers of the Church also and of all the just benefit us, we can easily understand how it is that the masters of the spiritual life so greatly exalt the power and efficacy of prayer. "If thou wishest," says St. Bonaventure,

"to endure adversity patiently, be a man of prayer; if thou wishest to conquer temptation and mental anxiety, to overcome the emotions of the passions, to discover the wiles of Satan and escape his snares, to live cheerfully in the service of God and walk undisturbed in the way of cares and tribulations, be a man of prayer. If thou wishest to lead a spiritual life and resist the lusts and desires of sensuality, to banish proud and evil thoughts, to fill thy soul with holy and good thoughts and aspirations and devout sentiments, be a man of prayer. If thou wishest to strengthen thy heart in God's service with a manly spirit and steadfast resolutions, to extirpate thy faults and to enrich thyself with virtues, be a man of prayer." "Prayer," says St. John Chrysostom, "is a haven for the tempest-tossed, an anchor for those that are at the mercy of the

waves, a staff for the tottering, a treasure for the poor, security for the rich, a preservative against and a cure of disease, and a protection of health. Prayer insures our spiritual goods against loss, and quickly changes the evils that oppress us. It enables us to resist all allurements to sin, and to bear up manfully with loss of goods and adversity. Prayer is a place of refuge against sadness, the basis of cheerfulness, the cause of constant joy, the source of true wisdom. He who can pray earnestly, however great his poverty, is richer than all others; but he who neglects prayer, were he even seated on a throne, is the poorest of all. . . . Prayer is the most powerful of weapons and an inexhaustible treasure. . . . What cannot be effected by wealth, art and skill, by the experience of physicians and by the greatest influence, has been successfully achieved by the prayer

of a poor and destitute person. . . . The power of prayer has already extinguished the power of fire, tamed the fury of wild beasts, put an end to wars and conflicts, dispelled storms, expelled the evil spirits, opened the gates of heaven, burst asunder the bonds of death, and averted injury and misfortune."

According to the testimony of Holy Scripture and of history, all those who have prayed properly have always obtained whatever they asked. Often the Lord rescued them from desperate situations, and this not unfrequently by astonishing miracles. In prayer the saints had everything in their power; they raised their voice, and nature altered its course. "Sighs ascended to heaven," says St. Augustine, "and miracles descended." By prayer David obtained the pardon of his sins, Solomon the spirit of wisdom, Ezechias the prolongation of his

life, Manasses the soothing of God's wrath, the Machabees the most decisive victory over the enemies of their nation, the apostles the successful and rapid spread of the Gospel, and the Church her triumph over the most bloody persecutions and the most fearful storms.

But besides obtaining for us gifts and graces, prayer bears manifold heavenly fruits, among which the following are the principal. First, in prayer our mind is always more and more enlightened, and we learn to know God better, to detach our heart ever more and more from all that is earthly and mean, and to raise it towards that which is more noble and heavenly, and we become more and more conversant and united with God, and make progress in perfection. Secondly, in prayer we exercise very many virtues, and especially faith, hope, charity, humility, and since it is necessary to overcome sloth,

sensuality and inconstancy, in order to pray well, we exercise also self-denial and constancy. Thirdly, prayer, when offered in the state of grace, is highly meritorious, and increases sanctifying grace and the heavenly reward. Fourthly, by prayer we become always more and more similar to God. Just as we contract the manners of those with whom we frequently associate, so also the soul that associates much with God in prayer, becomes like God. "Since those who associate with the learned and the wise," says St. John Chrysostom, "soon acquire a tinge of learning and education, what must happen to him who has frequent intercourse in prayer with God — the sublimest and eternal Wisdom! How wise, how virtuous, how temperate and holy will he not soon become!" Fifthly, prayer consoles us in suffering, calms anxiety, and fills with joy and a foretaste of heavenly bliss.

On the contrary, he who does not pray leads a God-forsaken, sad and gloomy life, and becomes gradually more and more similar to irrational animals and to the evil spirits, which neither do nor can pray.

It is clear that all this does not apply to that kind of prayer which consists only in the motion of the lips and the sound of the voice. The prayer that truly gives honor to God and obtains His grace, is an exercise of both mind and heart, and of the heart especially, for it is the heart principally that prays. The prayer that remains within the mind and heart is called mental prayer. When the devout prayer of the heart is expressed in words, it is called vocal prayer.

Mental prayer is the most excellent form of prayer. We should, nevertheless, not depreciate or neglect vocal prayer, which, when united with interior devotion, is pleasing to God and very profitable to us in

several ways. First, it comprises an essential part of divine service and pays to God the homage which our whole being, our body as well as our soul, owes to God. It is meet and just that we praise God, not in our heart only, but also with our lips. Secondly, it pertains to human nature to express in words the sentiments of the heart. Thirdly, when vocal prayer is becomingly said, our mind is recollected and our devotion nourished and increased. Fourthly, in both the Old and New Testaments God approved and commanded vocal prayer. Jesus Christ said vocal prayers and taught the most excellent of vocal prayers to His apostles. The Church herself prescribes in the Divine Office many vocal prayers to be recited daily by the clergy and by religious. Some persons recite many vocal prayers; this is very well, provided their heart is moved and their piety and devotion pro-

moted thereby. But a mere motion of the lips, without sincerity and devotion of the heart, is displeasing to God and bears no fruit. Others say but few vocal prayers; this is far better, if it is done with the intention of devoting more time to mental prayer. In this kind of prayer there is no need of restriction as to the length of time spent therein, provided only that we make it as well as we can.

The prayer we offer in secret is specially wholesome and powerful, first, on account of our greater recollection; secondly, because we thereby shun all danger of hypocrisy; thirdly, because it indicates a special love of prayer and a lively faith. We should, then, pray much in secret and in solitude, according to our Saviour's admonition, "When thou prayest, go into thy chamber, lock the door and pray in secret to thy heavenly Father" (Mat. vi. 6).

Prayer said in common and in public possesses special efficacy, already on account of the union of faith, hope and charity of many, and also particularly on account of our divine Saviour's promise: "I say to you, that if two of you shall consent upon earth, concerning any thing whatsoever they shall ask, it shall be done to them by My Father who is in heaven. For where there are two or three gathered together in My name, there I am in the midst of them" (Mat. xviii. 19, 20). Hence, every one should gladly pray in common with others, both in public in the church and at home with the inmates of the house at morning and night prayers and other family devotions. From this it follows that it is profitable to us and pleasing to God to join pious confraternities, in order to share in the prayers of others, to recommend one's self to their prayers, as St. Paul does in every

one of his epistles to the Christians of his day.

We should and may pray only for what is good and pleasing to God. But only that is good and pleasing to Him which conduces to His honor and to the salvation of ourselves or of our fellow-men. In the first place, there are certain divine gifts that are conducive to God's honor and our salvation always and under all circumstances. These are divine grace, the forgiveness of sins, Christian virtue and justice, perseverance in the state of grace, a good death, and eternal happiness. Secondly, there are things that may either promote our salvation or lead to our ruin, and of which we do not know whether, in our case, they are profitable or injurious to God's honor and our salvation. Such are temporal goods, *e.g.*, health, success in our undertakings, temporal prosperity, and deliverance from physical evils and suffer-

ings either of body or of soul. We should, first of all, and frequently and unconditionally pray for those divine graces that are always conducive to God's honor and our salvation. These prayers are always granted. We should, before all, pray for the forgiveness of our sins and for all the graces necessary to obtain it, and then for victory over temptations to sin. We may also pray to be wholly free from temptations; but, as temptations in themselves are not evil, and may be useful and even necessary to strengthen our virtue and maintain us in humility and watchfulness, God does not always grant this prayer, but then He will always give us the grace to overcome the temptation, if, on our part, we make use of the proper means. We have a remarkable illustration of this in St. Paul, whose prayer to be freed from a great temptation was not granted, in order that he might have the

merit of combating it and of perfecting himself in virtue. "There was given me," he writes, "a sting of my flesh, an angel of Satan, to buffet me. For which thing I thrice besought the Lord, that it might depart from me. And He said to me, My grace is sufficient for thee, for virtue is made perfect in infirmity" (2 Cor. xii. 7–9). Finally, we should pray for all the Christian virtues, especially for those we need the most and of which we are most destitute. Let us often pray for an increase of faith, hope and charity, for true humility, chastity in accordance with our state of life, meekness and the graces necessary to fulfil the duties of our state, for the grace always to receive the sacraments worthily, the grace of prayer, the love of Jesus Christ, a childlike confidence in the Mother of God, and especially for the last and greatest of all graces — the grace of final perseverance and a holy death.

As to temporal goods and deliverance from temporal and physical evils, we may pray for them also with confidence, yet under this condition, "If such be the will of God, if it be conducive to God's honor and profitable to our salvation."

First of all and before all we should pray for ourselves, for our own salvation, and then for our neighbor's salvation also, just as for our own, for we should love our neighbor as ourselves. In a special manner we should pray first for those with whom we are connected, not only as fellow-beings, but also by special ties and duties, viz.: for all related to us, such as our parents, our children, brothers and sisters, relatives, friends, those subject to us, and then for our spiritual and temporal superiors. Parents, pastors, and teachers should bear in mind that, without fervent prayer, they cannot effect anything for the salvation

of those intrusted to them. Secondly, we should pray for those who stand in greater need of our prayers, that is, (1) heretics, unbelievers and sinners, for all who are in great danger of their salvation. Hence there is nothing more exalted, or more charitable and meritorious, than the prayer for the conversion of sinners. — (2) The innocent in danger of sin and seduction, especially for the youth who are nowadays so exposed to spiritual dangers. — (3) The dying in the agony of death. There are men dying at every second of time. — (4) The suffering souls in purgatory, who so greatly long for our suffrages and are so worthy of them. In the third place, since our salvation and that of all men depends chiefly on the propagation and prosperity of the true religion, — the Church of God on earth, — we ought always fervently to pray for the holy Catholic Church, for her head, our

holy Father the Pope, for our Bishop, for our pastors, and for the clergy and the religious orders. We should implore God to preserve His Church from all internal and external enemies, from schisms and scandals, and beseech Him to give His people good, pious, zealous priests, and increase faith, charity and all Christian virtues in our parish, and generally among all Christians.

When thou wishest to pray, first collect thy thoughts according to the admonition of the Holy Ghost, "Before prayer prepare thy soul, and be not as a man that tempteth God" (Eccl. xviii. 23). Banish all foreign thoughts, and, by a short and fervent act of faith, place thyself in the presence of God, considering that God is present near thee, in thy very heart, and knows its every thought and affection. In the next place, since God hears only such as have a pure, or at least a penitent, heart, and since

the prayer of the impenitent is "an abomination before Him" (Prov. xxviii. 9), accustom thyself before prayer to awaken within thee a short but fervent act of contrition and divine love, and to humble thyself before God, "Thou shalt not, O God, despise a contrite and humbled heart" (Ps. l. 19). Then in thy prayer speak to God with all reverence and with the utmost confidence. With reverence, speak as a lowly sinful creature to thy Creator and sovereign Lord. This reverence should pervade thy interior and, at the same time, be expressed in thy exterior deportment. Hence, whenever possible, pray kneeling and with joined hands. It is especially in church that thou shouldst take a modest and respectful posture, for, on the one hand, thou art obliged to do this out of due reverence to thy Saviour present in the Blessed Sacrament; and, on the other hand, it is not

enough that thou refrain from giving scandal to those present, but thou art bound also to edify them by thy conduct. The principal power of prayer, however, consists in a childlike confidence; hence our Saviour taught us to address God as — Our Father. And St. Paul says, "You have not received the spirit of bondage again in fear; but you have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry, Abba (Father)" (Rom. viii. 15). Hence not as distrustful servants with a severe master, but as children with a most loving father, or with their tender mother, should we speak with God, with our Saviour. And even the greatest sinner, if he be truly contrite, may and should go to God with a similar childlike confidence, and, like the prodigal son to his father, should thus speak to God. "Beloved Father, I have, indeed, sinned grievously, and deserve nought but punishment; but

Thou art still my Father, forgive me; I will earnestly strive to amend my life." In the next place, we should endeavor to pray with fervor and recollection. Distractions, to which we have not given occasion and which we do not like, but try to banish, should not disturb us. It does not depend entirely upon us to be free from all distractions; the inconstancy and weakness of our mind is so great, that it is almost impossible for us to attend to the meaning of the words we pronounce for any length of time without distraction. Sensible unction and continuous devotion in prayer are a great delight; but he who combats the distractions and perseveres in prayer, notwithstanding dryness of spirit, obtains many graces and great merits. In general, good Christians should not be uneasy or despondent, if, as they imagine, prayer does not succeed with them, or if they experience therein no inte-

rior consolation or enjoyment. The fruit of prayer does not make its appearance during, but after, prayer. He who, by means of prayer, becomes better, stronger in virtue, more humble, more patient, more faithful in the duties of his state, more considerate and charitable towards his fellow-men, has prayed well, very well indeed, however dry and distracted he may have been. "The very apprehension that we may not pray well," says St. Augustine, "is an excellent prayer." Finally, in order to be heard, we should pray in the name of Jesus Christ; that is, we must hope and desire that our prayers be heard, not on account of our worthiness and merits, as the proud pharisee desired, nor on account of the excellence of our prayer, or as if we had a right to be heard, but solely and only on account of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and our Saviour. Let us before concluding our

prayers beseech the heavenly Father through Jesus Christ, His beloved Son, through His bitter passion and death and His precious blood shed for us. Let us turn also to the Sacred Heart of Jesus Himself, for He says to us, "If you ask Me any thing in My name, that I will do" (John xiv. 14). Let us, in consideration of our unworthiness and weaknesses, beseech the holy angels and the saints, and especially the holy Mother of God, whose influence with her Son is unlimited, to assist us by their intercession, and then we may confidently expect to receive what we pray for.

CHAPTER III.

Method of Meditation.

To meditate means in general nothing else than to reflect seriously on some subject. Meditation, as mental prayer, is a serious reflection on some religious truth or event, united with reference and application to ourselves, in order thereby to excite in us certain pious sentiments — such as contrition, humility, faith, hope, charity, etc. — and to move our will to form good resolutions conformable to these pious sentiments. Such an exercise has naturally a beneficial influence on our soul and greatly conduces to enlighten our mind and to move our will to practise virtue. This is confirmed by the

experience of all the fervent servants of God, who not only were themselves zealously addicted to this kind of prayer, but also earnestly recommended it to all Christians who have at heart their salvation and the perfection compatible with their state. "Fervent meditation," says St. Thomas, "enlightens the understanding, dispels ignorance, inflames the will with holy desires, and turns its attention to divine things." St. Bernard thus recommends it: "Mental prayer purifies the soul, directs our inclinations, regulates our actions and morals, corrects our faults and sanctifies our life." St. Teresa was so persuaded of the efficacy of this means of salvation, that she asserted that he who daily devotes a quarter of an hour to mental prayer cannot be lost. As many do not practise this kind of prayer under the plea that it is too difficult, we give here a method of meditation according to St. Igna-

tius, from which every one can perceive that mental prayer is something so natural to the soul, that there can be no great difficulty in practising it.

Remote Preparation. Lay aside all that hinders meditation, — such as a worldly spirit, distractions, — and practise what promotes it, that is, mortification, self-denial, recollection.

Proximate Preparation. Carefully read the subject of meditation on the preceding evening, and determine not only the points of the meditation together with the preparation, but also more especially the fruit thou intendest to draw therefrom corresponding to the present state of thy soul. When retiring to rest reflect on the subject of meditation. At awakening turn thy thoughts to it again, and occupy thyself with it while dressing and during thy other duties until the time of meditation. Before beginning

it, recollect thyself, considering before whom thou art, what thou intendest to do, with whom thou wishest to speak, and with a very lively faith represent God as present to thyself; then kneel down and fervently recite the

Preparatory Prayer. O my God, I firmly believe that Thou art here present, and I acknowledge that, because of my sins, I am wholly unworthy to appear in Thy holy presence. Trusting, nevertheless, in Thy infinite goodness and mercy, I venture to speak to Thee, to call upon Thy holy Name, and to meditate on Thy teachings and commandments, in order always to know better and fulfil more faithfully Thy holy will. Enlighten, then, my understanding that I may discover what I should do or omit in order to promote my salvation, that I may, with my whole heart, repent of my sins and of my neglect and want of fidelity in Thy ser-

vice, and resolve to perform all that Thou requirest of me. Grant me especially the grace to know Jesus Christ, my Redeemer and Guide, always better and better, so that I may love Him more ardently, and may, after His example, labor, combat and suffer with generosity and self-sacrifice.

First Prelude. Vividly represent to thyself the place, the persons, or at least an image of the subject of the meditation, in order to prevent distractions, more easily grasp the truth itself and more deeply impress it on thy mind. Thus thou wilt have less difficulty in bringing back thy mind, when it wanders, to the subject of meditation.

Second Prelude. Pray to God to enlighten thy understanding and stir up thy will, that thou mayst obtain the fruit thou seekest from the meditation, such as the giving up of some fault, or the acquisition of some virtue. Take a suitable position; do not let

thy eyes wander about, but keep them either closed or quietly fixed on some object, *e.g.*, on a crucifix, or a picture of Our Lady, etc.

The Meditation is thus made. Begin by exercising thy memory briefly on one point after another, so that if a point contains some practical teaching, thou representest it as given to thee — and by whom. If, however, it contains some fact, thou shouldst represent it to thyself with all its principal circumstances, just as if it were enacted before thy eyes; and then thou canst ask thyself: Who did this? How? When? Where? Why, etc.?

Exercise of the Understanding. Thou next reflectest more closely on what thy memory represented to thee, in order to penetrate the meaning of the truth under consideration, to understand its reasons, to acknowledge its importance, to weigh well its consequences, and thus clearly and vividly grasp

what thou canst apply to thyself. To facilitate this reflection, answer the following questions: (1) What should I especially consider in this truth, in this fact?—(2) What can and should I learn therefrom?—(3) What am I actually required to perform?—(4) Who imparts this doctrine, this hint, this command?—(5) How have I hitherto acted? Does my past life, my past conduct, agree with the teaching or truth on which I am meditating? What are the usual causes and inducements of my past shortcomings? On what occasions do I generally fall?—(6) How should I act in future, and already on this very day, on such and such an occasion?—(7) How suitable, how necessary, how easy, how difficult, how useful, how agreeable, is it for me to do this? What have I to hope by doing it? What to fear if I do not? How have the saints acted in such cases? How would my Saviour, the

most Blessed Virgin, my holy Patrons act, were they in my place? — (8) What obstacles must I remove, what means employ, to overcome the inordinate inclinations which, as I know, are the principal sources of my wrong-doing?

Exercise of the Will. This is done by often awakening, during the foregoing considerations, pious sentiments of contrition, love, thanksgiving, admiration, shame, fear, confidence and the like, as may be appropriate to the subject meditated. But thou shouldst especially make good resolutions for the future, and particularly for the present day. Thy resolutions should be earnest and sincere, not too general, and suited to thy present wants and circumstances. In making them thou shouldst endeavor to foresee the obstacles and difficulties in the way, and likewise the means and manner of removing and overcoming them.

It matters not in what order the three aforesaid faculties are exercised during meditation, and it is still less necessary to classify them, that is, to define or ascertain to which faculty each operation belongs. The principal thing is to acknowledge the truth, to take it earnestly to heart and to be moved thereby to amend our life and make progress in virtue.

Having gone through the first point in this way, thou mayst proceed in like manner with the second point, and then with the third. But so long as thy mind or thy heart finds nourishment in any point or thought, thou shouldst dwell thereon, even if this would take up the whole time allotted to the meditation. What remains of it may serve for the next day's meditation.

When we speak with God in the exercise of the will and in awakening in us pious affections and good resolutions, we should

show greater reverence, not only interiorly, but also in our exterior deportment.

If thou sufferest from distractions or spiritual dryness, beware of interrupting, shortening or giving up the meditation for this reason. On the contrary, be persuaded that, if thou bear this trial with patience and resignation, humbling thyself before God and persevering in prayer, thou canst gain many graces and much merit.

At the end of the meditation collect thy resolutions together, and, in the form of a colloquy, beseech the Blessed Virgin to obtain for thee the grace to perform them conscientiously, saying a Hail Mary to this intention. Then, with the same object in view, turn to thy divine Saviour as to thy Mediator with the Father and recite this beautiful prayer of St. Ignatius.

Soul of Christ, sanctify me. — Body of Christ, save me. — Blood of Christ, inebriate

me.—Water from the side of Christ, wash me.—Passion of Christ, strengthen me.—O good Jesus, hear me.—Within thy wounds hide me.—Permit me not to be separated from Thee.—From the malignant enemy defend me.—In the hour of my death call me.—And bid me come to Thee.—That with Thy saints I may praise Thee.—Forever and ever. Amen.

Finally, with the same intention, turn to God the Father and devoutly recite the Our Father.

These colloquies should be carried on as if a friend were speaking with a friend, a servant with his employer, a child with his father, a patient with his physician, by imploring some grace, or accusing one's self of a past fault, or making known one's doubts or difficulties, etc., and begging counsel and assistance.

Choose an aspiration or a text of Scrip-

ture, or a short saying that resumes briefly the whole meditation. Repeat it often during the day at thy work, and especially during temptation, that thou mayst remember the resolution of thy meditation and thy promise to God.

Finally, examine how thou didst make thy meditation by answering these questions: (1) How did I make the preparation? — (2) Did I on the eve read or listen with attention to the meditation, when it was read, and appoint both preludes and the fruit to be drawn from it? — (3) Did I recall the points before falling asleep? — (4) Did I on awakening reflect on them, and also while dressing and during the rest of the time until the hour of meditation? — (5) How did I conduct myself during meditation? — (6) Was I calm and recollected at the beginning? — (7) Did I devoutly say the preparatory prayer? —

(8) How did I make the two preludes?—(9) Did I call to mind the subject of meditation?—(10) Did I perform well the exercise of the understanding?—(11) What lights did I receive?—(12) What consolations or distractions did I have?—(13) How did I act with regard to the distractions, or during the time of dryness?—(14) Did I endeavor to exercise the affections and the will more than the understanding?—(15) Was the position of my body appropriate, showing greater reverence during the exercise of the will than during that of the understanding?—(16) Did I dwell on each point as long as I found nourishment therein?—(17) Did I engage in colloquy with God, or with Mary or the saints?—(18) Did I devote the whole of the prescribed time to meditation?— If we discover that our meditation was well made, let us thank

God and resolve to do as well the next time. If our meditation was a failure, in whole or in part, let us examine why it was so, repent of our want of fidelity and resolve to be more conscientious the next time.

It promotes greatly our spiritual life to keep a memorandum of the special lights received during meditation, and of our most important resolutions, and to read them from time to time, especially on our monthly retreat days.

SYNOPSIS OF THE METHOD OF MEDITATION.

PREPARATION.

Remote.	Proximate.
1. Remove the obstacles (worldliness, distractions, etc.).	1. Read the subject on the eve and reflect thereon on retiring and on rising.
2. Practice what is required (humility, mortification, recollection, etc.).	2. Begin calmly and with recollection, by placing thyself in God's presence and kneeling down.
Preparatory Prayer, p. 60.	

THE BEGINNING.

First Prelude. Represent to thyself the place, the personages, or an image of the subject of meditation.

Second Prelude. Pray for light for thy understanding and for inspiration for thy will, that thou mayst derive the special fruit of this meditation.

THE MIDDLE.

Thy *memory* places the subject of meditation before the mind: who? what? where? how? when? why?

The *understanding* reflects on the subject: (1) What should I specially consider in this subject? — (2) What practical conclusion should I draw therefrom? — (3) How have I hitherto observed this? — (4) How should I observe it in future? — (5) Why? Is it meet (for me as man, as Christian, etc.)

— useful for both this life and the next — easy and agreeable (grace of God, peace of mind), necessary? — (6) What obstacles must I remove? What means should I use?

The *will* is exercised during the whole meditation, first, by pious affections, acts of admiration, gratitude, self-humiliation, fear, love, contrition, confidence, desire; secondly, by special good resolutions to be performed that very day.

THE END.

Colloquy with Mary as our advocate with Jesus. — Hail Mary. — With Jesus as our Mediator with the Father. — Soul of Christ, etc., p. 66. — With God the Father. — Our Father.

Choice of a saying or of a pious aspiration, which may remind thee during the day of thy resolution.

RETROSPECT.

1. Examine how thou didst make the meditation. If well, thank God and resolve to make it always well. If poorly, be sorry for it, seek and remove the causes.

2. Review once more the whole truth meditated upon, especially what may have enlightened thee or caused thee dryness; renew and confirm thy resolutions, and note down thy special lights.

CHAPTER IV.

Three Other Methods of Prayer.

Not all persons can pray and meditate in the same way. Some cannot long keep their minds fixed on a subject; others find it very difficult to reflect. A person may, on account of the state of the body or of the mind, not be able to meditate for a length of time according to the method given above. We therefore give here the three simpler and easier methods of prayer laid down by St. Ignatius in his Spiritual Exercises. St. Francis Xavier was wont to recommend most earnestly to all the first of these methods, and even impose it on his penitents as a penance to be performed morning and evening.

FIRST METHOD OF PRAYER.

It consists in quietly recollecting one's self and, after a short preparatory prayer, in reflecting tranquilly and simply on the commandments of God, on the seven capital sins, the three powers of the soul, the five senses of the body, for as long as it takes to recite three Our Fathers and three Hail Marys, somewhat as follows: —

I. At each commandment of God reflect (1) how good, meet, just and holy it is; (2) what great advantages its observance, and what injury its transgression entails; (3) how we have hitherto observed it. If we have faithfully kept it, let us thank God and resolve to continue to observe it in future. If we have transgressed it, let us excite ourselves to contrition, crave pardon for our sins and the remittance of the punishment deserved, resolve to amend,

imploring of God the grace to do so, and say the Our Father. If we get through with one commandment before the time of the meditation is up, we should proceed in the same manner with another commandment. Having thus gone through several commandments, let us accuse ourselves before God of our transgressions, pray for grace and assistance henceforth to observe them more faithfully, and conclude by a prayer full of childlike confidence in God our Lord.

II. At each of the seven capital sins consider, first, its great malice and how meet it is that it should be forbidden; secondly, what great injury it does to those who commit it; thirdly, whether and how we have hitherto avoided it, and intend henceforth to avoid it. This is to be done, not as if we were examining our conscience as a preparation for confession, but only in general, without

thinking of any special sinful act. In order the better to acknowledge our past faults, we should carefully consider the opposite virtue; and, in order the more surely to avoid them in future, we should strive to practise and acquire the contrary virtue.

III. At each of the three powers of the soul — memory, understanding, will — and of the five senses of the body, consider, first, how noble, useful and necessary it is; secondly, for what purpose it has been given to thee; thirdly, how Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin made use of it; fourthly, how thou hast employed it; and fifthly, how thou intendest to use it henceforth.

He who wishes to take our Lord Jesus Christ as his Model in the use of his senses, should, in the preparatory prayer, recommend himself to Him, and after considering each sense, recite an Our Father or a Hail Mary. He who intends to imitate the

Blessed Virgin Mary in the use of his senses, ought, in the preparatory prayer, specially to recommend himself to her, that she may obtain for him from her divine Son the necessary grace, and recite a Hail Mary after the consideration of each sense.

SECOND METHOD OF PRAYER.

It is made in this manner. After recollecting ourselves a few moments and reciting an appropriate preparatory prayer, we should kneel or sit, just as we prefer, or, in order to be more recollected, remain with our eyes closed or fixed on a certain point or object; we should then recite slowly some prayer, *e.g.*, an Our Father, a Hail Mary, the Apostles' Creed, the Soul of Christ, the Hail, holy Queen, etc., dwelling long enough on each word to discover its diverse meanings, and to find therein appropriate comparisons, spiritual enjoyment and consolation. And

how much of all this is often found in a single word! After this we continue in like manner with the rest of the prayer. If in one or two words we find matter enough for reflection, spiritual enjoyment and consolation, we should continue to dwell thereon even until the end of the meditation. In this case we conclude the meditation by merely reciting the rest of the prayer, and begin our next meditation where we left off at the foregoing, after previously reciting that part of the prayer on which we have already meditated. At the end of the meditation we should make short aspirations to whomsoever the prayer is addressed, that we may obtain the grace or virtue of which we stand most in need.

THIRD METHOD OF PRAYER.

This method is thus employed. After recollecting ourselves for a few moments,

and making an appropriate preparatory prayer, we should recite some vocal prayer so slowly and so devoutly as to take breath between each word and reflect on its meaning. In so doing we direct our attention to the saint etc., to whom the prayer is addressed, or to our own wretchedness, or to the immense distance between that saint's grandeur and dignity and our own worthlessness. Having finished the prayer in this manner, we spend the remainder of the time in reciting some vocal prayers in the usual way. We may, if time allows, make use of more than one prayer at our meditation. This method of prayer infuses greater reverence for and attention to the words of our ordinary prayers.

CHAPTER V.

Method of Examination of Conscience.

In his Spiritual Exercises St. Ignatius teaches a twofold examination of conscience, — the particular and the general.

I. THE PARTICULAR EXAMEN.

Every man has a predominant passion, fault, imperfection, or sin, which is, as it were, the root and source of all the others. The particular examen is the most efficient remedy against this evil. Although we may have several passions or faults, we should, nevertheless, combat one of them in a special manner, and after extirpating or removing it, we should proceed to combat

and extirpate the others also, one at a time. The following are the prescriptions of St. Ignatius on this subject, which he most punctually followed till his death.

First, on rising in the morning at once resolve earnestly to avoid carefully during the morning the fault thou wishest to combat and lay aside; but if thou hast the misfortune to fall into it, strike thy breast, but so, however, as not to be noticed by others.

Secondly, at noon before dinner, and at night before retiring, invoke the Holy Ghost, and then review in thy mind each hour (works, places, events, persons), from early rising, or at noon to the moment of examination, to find out how often thou hast fallen into the fault thou art striving to extirpate. Thou shouldst keep a daily account of the number of faults discovered at each examination, so that thou mayst compare the result of each with the preceding, day by day,

and week by week, and thus discover whether there is any amendment in thy conduct. After this awaken in thy heart sincere sorrow, and firmly resolve to do better till the next examination. To simplify this comparison, the account of faults committed may be kept thus, using the upper line of each day to mark the faults committed in the morning, and the lower one for the faults committed in the afternoon.

Sunday { _____ _____

Monday { _____ _____

Tuesday { _____ _____

Wednesday { _____ _____

Thursday { _____ _____

Friday { _____ _____

Saturday { _____ _____

The space allotted for each day grows shorter as the week proceeds, to show that the number of thy faults should daily diminish.

With the particular is usually joined

II. THE GENERAL EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE.

This examination of conscience comprises all the sins and faults we may commit in thought, word, deed and omission, and embraces the following points:—

1. Thanksgiving to God for benefits received.

2. Prayer for grace to know, repent of, and shun our faults.

3. Examination of each sin committed in thought, word, deed and omission since the previous examination.

4. Prayer for pardon.

5. Resolution to amend. — Our Father.

HOW TO MAKE THE PARTICULAR AND THE GENERAL EXAMEN OF CONSCIENCE.

At the time appointed make the sign of the cross, recollect thyself, and with fervor and attention.

I. Thank God for the benefits conferred on thee.

O my God, I firmly believe that Thou art here present, that Thou seest and hearest me, and knowest even my most hidden thoughts and my innermost affections. In profound humility and awe I adore Thee and acknowledge Thee as my Lord and God. To Thee I owe all that I am and have, both in the order of nature and in that of grace. Out of infinite love Thou hast created me and preserved me until now out of Thy exceedingly great mercy, and kept me this day through Thy loving and watchful providence. The Redemption, through

Christ's Incarnation and death, and its fruits — the vocation to the true faith and sanctifying grace are so many proofs of Thy fatherly love for me. For these and innumerable other benefits, both corporal and spiritual, received from Thy fatherly hand since the beginning of my existence, and especially on this day, I thank Thee from my inmost heart and will ever remain grateful to Thee. Hence I intend to retract and repair, as far as in me lies, all my past ingratitude towards Thy infinite Goodness.

II. Beseech God for grace to discover all thy sins, to repent of them, and to amend in all earnestness.

Come, O Holy Ghost, enlighten my mind, that I may know wherein I have offended the divine Majesty and Goodness. Move my heart with Thy grace, that I may conceive true sorrow for my faults and sins, and efficaciously resolve to amend in future.

III. The examination itself should not take up more than one-third of the time allotted to the examination of conscience, so as to leave sufficient time for the requisite acts accompanying it.

Ask of thyself a strict account, first, in the particular examen of the fault thou art endeavoring to root out; secondly, in the general examen of all the faults committed since the previous examination.

1. At noon ask thyself: How did I make the particular examen last night? the general? How did I say my night prayers? Did I retire to rest at the appointed hour? Did I try to occupy myself until I fell asleep with thoughts of the morning meditation? If I awoke during the night, did I begin to pray? Did I rise as soon as I was called? Did I make my resolution in accordance with the subject of my particular examen? Did I think of the meditation

and occupy myself with thoughts in reference to it? Did I say any prayers while dressing? Did I make my meditation well? Did I devoutly hear Mass? and say the divine office devoutly? Did I employ my time well and fulfil my duties faithfully in every respect? Did I endeavor to have a good intention in all my actions.

2. In the evening ask thyself: Did I make well both examinations of conscience at noon? Did I devoutly say the prayers before and after meals? Did I not commit some fault during meals? Did I make my spiritual reading?

3. In the evening and at noon ask thyself: What special duties had I to perform? What special events happened? What did God then expect of me? What did I then do — will — desire — omit? Examine also in particular thy devotion and love towards God, whether thou didst omit or carelessly

say thy prayers, whether thou didst wilfully entertain distractions therein, whether thou wert wanting in reverence in the church and in recollection and in making a good intention; whether thou didst evince dissatisfaction and mistrust towards God in adversity; whether thou didst yield to doubts against faith; whether thou wert wanting in obedience to thy superiors, or neglected thy duties towards thy subjects. Then examine the sins thou didst commit against thy neighbor through unjust suspicion, rash judgments, envy, jealousy, hatred, revenge, contempt, anger, quarrelling, fault-finding, detraction, slander, unfaithfulness, dishonesty, lying, false accusation, bad example, aversion, or inordinate attachment. Finally, examine thyself on modesty and holy purity, and whether thou didst sin through vanity, self-complacency, pride, sensuality, dangerous pleasures, intemperance, wilful sinful

thoughts, words and deeds, human respect, impatience, pusillanimity, sloth, loss of time, etc.

IV. Humbly repent of thy sins and, what is the principal thing, crave for forgiveness.

O my God, I have unhappily failed to keep the promise I made at the last examen. I acknowledge and own my fault before Thee. Would that I had never offended Thee! Forgive me, O merciful God, the sins and faults of this day and of every day of my life. Forgive them in consideration of the infinite satisfaction offered for them by Thy well-beloved Son, my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, for I repent of them with my whole heart, because on account of them I have deserved to be punished by Thee, but more especially because I have been so ungrateful to Thee, my greatest Benefactor and most loving Father, and because I have offended Thee, the chief

and most amiable Good, and have so greatly outraged Thy infinite Goodness. O that I had never offended Thee! O Lord, deign to show that Thy mercy is greater than my wickedness, and grant me the grace to bewail my sins bitterly until death. I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned and acknowledge my iniquities. Hence I earnestly beseech Thee to pardon me. Pardon me, O Lord, and cast me not into perdition with my iniquities. Be not forever angry with me, and do not let me suffer everlasting punishment for my guilt, for Thou art God, the God of the contrite of heart.

V. Earnestly resolve, with the help of divine grace, to amend.

My Lord and my God, I solemnly declare before Thee that I will no longer prove ungrateful towards Thee. Relying on Thy grace, O God, I now firmly resolve never more to commit sin, and especially —

(here mention the fault which forms the subject of thy particular examen, or the sin which on this day has more grievously offended God), and, therefore, to flee all its occasions, and rather to lose all, to suffer all, than ever to fall into a grievous sin.

MEANS OF PERSEVERING IN ONE'S GOOD RESOLUTION.

1. Renew daily thy resolution at prayer, at holy Mass, and often during the day, especially before certain occasions.

2. Foresee the occasions of relapse, in order to avoid them, or at least to guard against them.

3. If thou relapsest, repent at once.

4. Every time thou fallest back into thy predominant fault, impose on thyself a small penance, both as a satisfaction for the fault and to increase thy watchfulness.

5. Often consider the motives thou hast for avoiding certain faults.

"Were we," says the Imitation, "to extirpate only one fault every year, how soon should we become perfect!"

CHAPTER VI.

Points for the Particular Examen during the Annual Retreat.

1. Hast thou actually loved retirement and left thy room only in case of necessity?

2. Didst thou preserve perfect modesty in thy conduct, and especially keep a restraint over thy eyes?

3. Didst thou banish every thought of thy occupations and of worldly things, and especially of things foreign to thy retreat?

4. Didst thou observe the prescribed order of the day and the directions given for thy retreat?

5. Didst thou employ well thy free time?

6. Didst thou read other books besides those recommended to thee?

7. Hast thou been sincere towards thy confessor regarding the state of thy soul?

8. Didst thou hear Mass devoutly and offer it to God, in order to derive fruit from the spiritual exercises?

9. Didst thou devoutly recite the beads and other vocal prayers, and fervently visit the Blessed Sacrament and invoke the saints of the day?

10. Didst thou banish all thoughts, however good in themselves, foreign to thy spiritual exercises?

11. Didst thou carefully refrain from laughter and from its occasions, and from whatever might induce distractions?

12. Didst thou, at the end of the meditation, carefully examine how thou didst make it?

13. Didst thou note down the lights received and the pious affections and good resolutions made during thy meditations?

CHAPTER VII.

On the Confession of Devotion.

(According to Father Boone.)

A Confession of devotion is one in which we have only such venial faults to confess as even the just fall into from time to time. It is thus called, because there is no divine or ecclesiastical commandment prescribing it. It is commanded to confess only mortal sins. The Church expressly teaches that venial sin may be atoned for by an act of contrition. The confession of devotion is particularly useful for those who earnestly strive after Christian perfection and conscientiously fulfil the duties of their state, for it assists them greatly in attaining perfect purity of

heart and receiving holy Communion with greater profit.

I. Motives for going to confession out of devotion.

1. The Church prescribes confession for the gaining of certain indulgences. Knowing how useful confession is, even when there is no mortal sin to confess, she wishes us to purchase the grace of these indulgences at the price of an exercise, which, though not strictly necessary, is yet highly profitable.

2. The saints, however holy they were, nevertheless went often to confession, and some of them even did so daily. This custom of frequent confession obtains also in all religious associations and confraternities that are well regulated and have a good spirit.

3. There are very few religious orders that do not prescribe at least weekly confession.

4. The advantages of the confession of devotion are great and numerous. In the first place, venial sins are forgiven by the priest's absolution. Their remission is a greater gain than the remission of a large debt of money or the deliverance from the deepest temporal misery.

Secondly, whenever we receive the sacrament of Penance with due dispositions, we obtain two new graces, provided we place no obstacle in the way. By the first the soul, previously in the state of grace, becomes still more intimately united with Jesus Christ, her Spouse. Who can enumerate the spiritual treasures gained by this more intimate union? Who can express the wonderful operations of the Holy Ghost in such a soul? His divine unction at times produces therein a cheerfulness of conscience and a peace surpassing all comprehension. The abundant outpourings of His love impart a

fresh life to all good works and render them more meritorious. Each of these works prepares for the soul an increase of bliss and glory in heaven. The second grace imparts fresh strength to the soul, enabling her to maintain herself in the state of grace and to resist the sins to which we, on account of our human frailty, are all exposed. And, at the same time, the soul acquires greater ease in the practice of virtue, and finds but little difficulty in accomplishing what she previously deemed impossible.

Thirdly, confession has a higher meaning, not only as a sacrament, but also as spiritual direction. The confessor endeavors to excite in his penitent a lively zeal for salvation and Christian perfection, and indicates to him the means of rooting out entirely his evil inclinations, by which his possession of sanctifying grace would be endangered. When, moreover, the confessor discovers

hearts that, to their happiness, have resolutely embraced a life of virtue, he does not fear to urge them on still more to the practice of the higher virtues, which less energetic souls dread so much.

Fourthly, among the exercises of humility there is none so difficult to human nature, none so meritorious, as confession. This is especially the case if we are wont to confess certain circumstances of our sins which are more humiliating than the sin itself; for instance, if we confess that we committed a certain fault out of envy, of vanity, or for the sake of appearing more pious, etc. Persons endowed with a naturally haughty spirit, or who are of a certain social standing or influence, do not like to own such motives to themselves, and much less to disclose them to others.

Fifthly, experience shows that even good Christians, on the day on which they con-

fess or intend to confess, watch more carefully over themselves than on other days. The same is true also of the days following confession, and is a fresh proof of the advantages derived from frequent confession by those who strive to avoid all grievous sins.

Finally, confession is a most appropriate preparation for holy Communion, far more efficient than the mere exciting one's self to contrition, which would suffice, as is well known, to enable those to communicate who have only venial sins on their conscience; and this is already a great advantage, regardless of the ease of self-delusion in supposing one's self to be guilty of venial sins merely, and of the fact that it is a strict rule not to omit confession before holy Communion without the confessor's permission. By the absolution imparted in confession, Jesus Christ prepares a dwelling

for Himself in the penitent's soul. He purifies it more and more by conferring on it the merit of His adorable blood; He ennobles all her sentiments and acts of virtue, and condescends to adorn in her the temple of the Holy Ghost.

Happy, then, are the faithful souls that confess often and, at the same time, prepare well to receive absolution worthily, and this not merely to secure a calm conscience, but to become more pleasing to our divine Saviour.

II. Examination of conscience before the confession of devotion.

"We should not torment ourselves," says St. Francis de Sales, "when we are not conscious of having any serious fault to confess; for it is not credible that a soul that often examines her conscience, should not remember notable faults, if she has committed any. . . . We should not

be so narrow-minded as to wish to confess all our little imperfections, all our little weaknesses. Whenever we perceive them, we can speak about them to our divine Saviour. An interior act of humility, a loving aspiration, will suffice for this. . . . We should learn to bear, with a certain spiritual elevation, all these little things, which we cannot remove, and which usually proceed from our imperfect nature. Among these are, — our inconstancy of disposition, of our resolutions, desires, and the like, to which we are and shall ever remain subject, so long as we are in this changeable and transitory life. . . . These things are not sins, but human miseries and inconveniences."

Too long an examination of conscience wearies our mind and cools our heart. Many, who frequently confess, devote too long a time to their examination, trying to

ferret out every little circumstance, and forgetting besides — what is most important — to excite themselves to contrition and to prepare their hearts properly to receive absolution.

How is the examination of conscience to be made before the confessions of devotion? We should, without worry, uneasiness, or confusion, employ the time for examining our conscience. The scrupulous should in this adhere strictly to the directions of their confessor. In our examination let us attend to the following points: —

1. The faults committed wilfully and deliberately.

2. The faults concerning the points specially impressed on us, or concerning which grace oftenest reproaches us.

3. The faults that scandalize or injure our neighbor.

4. The faults which, on account of our

past sins, may at some future time cause us to relapse into them.

5. The faults that proceed from our unwillingness to make a sacrifice which God demands of us in our state of life.

6. Those faults, which, though inconsiderable in themselves, nevertheless indicate in us a former great and dangerous passion, of which they are the remains.

Then we need do nothing more than to classify under one or two heads the faults that escape us through human frailty.

III. Contrition in the confession of devotion.

1. Many assert that they cannot have contrition, however much they may try. To these St. Francis de Sales answers: "We do much with God in trying to will, and we have already contrition by the very fact that we sincerely desire to have it. Only we do not feel it when we desire it. Like

the fire smouldering under the ashes without being seen, it is nevertheless there." "Contrition," says Father Quadrupani, "essentially consists in an act of the will detesting the faults committed and resolved never again to commit them." Tears, groans, sobs, sensible marks of sorrow, then, are not essential parts of true contrition. Let us not be uneasy at their absence. If God refuses us the consolation of feeling sorry, He does so in order to offer us the opportunity of obeying our confessor, telling us not to be uneasy at our want of sensible sorrow, and to approach the sacraments notwithstanding. This should suffice to assure us of our perfect reconciliation with God. Let us humbly believe the declaration of our confessor, obey him with courage and self-denial, and we shall obtain a twofold reward. It is wrong to make violent ef-

forts to feel contrition, for they produce only confusion, fatigue and discouragement. On the contrary, let us endeavor to be calm, and say to God with love, that we sincerely wish we had never offended Him, and that, with the assistance of His grace, we will henceforth no more offend Him. Such is the sorrow we should try to acquire, especially by imploring it of our Lord, who alone can produce it in our heart.

2. Others complain that they always remain the same and can perceive no fruit from their frequent confessions. They say the very same about their holy Communions. But how can any one know that he remains always the same and derives no profit from his frequent confessions and Communions? Is the penitent a fit judge in his own case? Is it not rather for the confessor to judge concerning this? And

if he saw not the least fruit, would he continue to insist on the penitent's continuing his confessions and holy Communions in spite of his anxiety? Is it a sufficient reason to think that we derive no fruit therefrom, because we do not see it clearly, or do not feel any consolation or spiritual sweetness therein? We should bear in mind that these sacraments often operate in so hidden a manner, as to be scarcely perceptible, for, like nature itself, *e.g.*, in the growth of a tree, grace acts very gradually and invisibly, as it were. Moreover, should we not consider it a gain, not only when we are actually making progress, but also when we do not fall or go back? Is it not already a great grace to escape falling into mortal sin? The preservative remedies are as precious as the curative and strengthening. In fine, the power of contrition and of good resolutions is seen also when, amid

a hundred occasions of sinning, we fall only a few times. Had we grown careless and made no efforts, and gone less frequently to confession, we would perhaps have committed as many sins as we have taken steps. It is, then, no proof of a want of contrition, if we usually have the same faults to confess. Let us sincerely endeavor to approach the sacraments only after due preparation, and we shall most assuredly derive every time an incomparable benefit therefrom. Such is the teaching of Rodriguez in his Christian Perfection (Chap. XIII. of the "Treatise on Holy Communion"), and of other ascetic writers.

3. By the priest's absolution we obtain the forgiveness of those venial sins for which we have contrition, even if we are not sorry for all the venial sins we confess. The reason is, on the one hand, that even in the sacrament of Penance we cannot

obtain the forgiveness of a sin for which we have little or no contrition, and, on the other hand, we are not obliged to confess our venial sins, and that, if our conscience does not reproach us with mortal sins, it suffices to confess one or the other venial sin with contrition and the firm purpose of amendment. It is quite otherwise with mortal sins. If we lack contrition for a single one of the mortal sins we confess, we not only receive no forgiveness, but we are guilty of sacrilege by receiving the sacrament of Penance unworthily. What we have just said about the confession of venial sins and the sufficiency of contrition for at least one of them, should ease the minds of the scrupulous, who are always worrying as to whether they had at confession contrition for each little fault. The more intense and universal our sorrow for venial sins, the more worthily we receive the sacrament of

Penance, and also the greater its blessings and efficacy. On the other hand, he who has only venial sins to confess, and is not sorry for at least one of them, renders the sacrament void, and does not and cannot receive it, for there is no matter for absolution, which can be imparted only to a sin repented of. Only the fact that he who thus confesses only venial sins without having contrition for any of them, is in good faith and does this unintentionally and without malice, can excuse him from the commission of sacrilege, that is, from the profanation of the sacrament of Penance.

As a means of avoiding such a misfortune and of quieting scruples, the teachers and masters of the spiritual life recommend that, at the end of our ordinary confessions of venial sins, we should never fail to include in our confession some grievous sin of our past life, for which we are certainly sorry,

and which we are firmly resolved never more to commit. The sins previously confessed are, indeed, not a necessary, but a sufficient matter for absolution, or rather the present absolution is a confirmation of the one previously received. In other words, although there is no necessity for confessing the sins once already worthily confessed and absolved, we may, nevertheless, do so in order thereby to receive with the absolution the sacrament of Penance and its many benefits. The accusation of past sins already absolved should not prevent us from making earnest efforts to have contrition for our present sins. For, we repeat, the sins for which we have not sufficient contrition, cannot be forgiven even by the sacrament of Penance.

4. According to the common and more secure opinion of theologians, the voluntary venial sins we remember cannot be forgiven in the sacrament of Penance without a true

contrition, that is, without a *special* contrition elicited in the soul after discovering them in our examination of conscience. Hence a sorrow for all of them in general or a detestation of our great sinfulness does not suffice. But this is not to be understood, as if it were required to make a special act of contrition for each sin, since it is sufficient to make a single act of contrition for all the sins of which we are aware, although our sorrow may be more particularly directed to one or the other sin. In order to obtain in the sacrament of Penance the forgiveness of faults of human frailty, or, as they are commonly called, of semi-voluntary venial sins, a contrition corresponding to the manner in which they are usually committed is sufficient. This contrition may be thus expressed: "I wish I had not committed them. When, O Lord, will the time come, when I shall no longer offend Thee?" We

detest our having committed them, we detest, in general, our many daily sins of this kind, and are resolved, *as far as possible*, to avoid them, or, as St. Thomas expresses it, to *diminish* their number. To diminish them, for, as will be said below (in 5), we cannot, on account of our natural weakness and frailty, possibly be entirely free from them during our earthly life. Let us here observe that careless and lukewarm Christians erroneously include under the head of "sins of human frailty" many sins that are voluntary, deliberate, and sometimes even grievous sins. Among sins of human frailty are reckoned a slight tinge of impatience, a transient self-complacent feeling, a brief slight suspicion, a short and hardly perceptible feeling of jealousy, a cursory judgment concerning our neighbor's conduct, an unpremeditated word liable to hurt another's feeling, distractions at prayer not at once detested, and the like.

God, knowing our natural weakness, forgives such faults more easily than the others. He knows what man is, who is formed from the dust of the earth, and that his imagination often disregards all restraint, although he ought constantly turn his attention to himself and to the many commandments imposed upon him.

5. These faults which escape us through surprise and are a consequence of the misery and wretchedness of our nature, will, at least to a certain degree, cling to us until our last breath. "It will be very much," says St. Francis de Sales, "if we are freed from certain defects a quarter of an hour before our death." Elsewhere he writes: "We are bound not only to bear our neighbor's infirmities, but to bear our own also, and to preserve patience at the sight of our imperfections. It is, then, necessary that we should bear with ourselves until God bears

us to heaven. Let us endeavor to amend, but gradually and without uneasiness. We cannot be angels before the time." "I beseech you," writes again the same saint, "do not look so much about you, but direct your attention to God and to yourself. You should never see God exempt of goodness nor yourself exempt of misery. Recognize your misery as the object of His goodness and mercy." "Do not grow weary," says Fénelon, "at taking a fresh start every day. Nothing so touches the heart of God as this humble and patient courage." "Virtue," said God to St. Paul, "is perfected in infirmity" (2 Cor. xii. 9).

Sensible devotion and spiritual consolations are less suited to bring us nearer to God than interior humiliations and frequent turning to Him. A sight pleasing in the eyes of God is that of a persevering, but tranquil, patient, and apparently fruitless

work of salvation, and of a soul, which, though full of defects and misery, yet united to Him by pious resolutions and sincere desires, strives earnestly not to displease Him wilfully. Such a soul, resolved to bear her imperfection inasmuch as it pleases God to leave it in her, and determined, nevertheless, constantly to combat her imperfection, is far more precious in the eyes of God than a soul that enjoys peace in the practice of virtue and the possession of spiritual goods. "God," says St. Francis de Sales, "left in some of His disciples many traces of their previous evil inclinations, for some time after their conversion, but it was for their greater good, as is taught us by the example of St. Peter. Let us manfully and courageously combat, but without too ardently desiring the satisfaction of success. We should not at all wish for anything evil, nor for anything too good.

Do not, I pray, love too passionately even the virtues themselves, for they are sometimes lost by transgressing the bounds of moderation." The holy Doctor, indeed, does not mean that we can too ardently love and seek virtue, but he hereby warns us against the impetuous, inordinate, and the often concealed self-seeking love of virtue. We should, then, labor and strive without anxiety as to the result. For, if we combat with perseverance, without growing disheartened at our faults, these will profit us as much as, or even more than, our victories. Let us intrust ourselves to the kind mercy of Him "who stretches out His hand under those who fall without malice, that they may receive no hurt, and who so tenderly and quickly raises them up, that they hardly notice their falls, because they fall into God's hands; nor do they notice their being raised up, because God lifts them up so

quickly, that they have not the time to think of it."

6. "You ask," writes again the holy bishop of Geneva, "how we can in a very short time excite ourselves to contrition. I say there is need for this of hardly any time at all, for nothing else is required than to prostrate ourselves before God in the spirit of humility and sorrow for the offences committed against Him." If we have a lively faith fully conscious of who God is whom we have offended, and of what we owe Him; if we are deeply convinced of our ingratitude in offending Him after having received from Him so many graces and benefits, as well as of the injury sin does to our soul and the punishments it deserves; if we have an intense longing to become again pleasing to our divine Redeemer, then there easily and quite naturally arises in us contrition for our venial sins. But if we

are not always in the proper mood for this, what should we do? Nothing else than most fervently and humbly to beseech God for contrition, and to try to deserve it by some voluntary good works, such as to spend well the time of prayer, and especially to employ the time of preparation for confession by meditating on such truths as suggest to our hearts powerful motives never to offend God again, such as vividly representing to ourselves our Lord Jesus Christ in the garden of olives, on the cross, to cast ourselves at His feet, considering that this will perhaps be our last confession.

IV. The accusation of venial sins.

In accusing ourselves of our sins, let us mention only what concerns us without mixing up the faults of others with our own. In this we should aim at clearness, brevity and perfect sincerity, representing to ourselves that we are at the feet of Jesus

Christ, that we are speaking with God Himself in the person of our confessor, His representative. The integrity of accusation for the validity of confession extends only to mortal sins. And although it is very salutary and useful to confess also our venial sins, their omission in whole or in part does not affect the validity of our confession. Such is the teaching of the Church. Those who confess frequently are apt to fall into the following faults in telling their venial sins: First, they wish to tell *everything;* secondly, they do not tell what they ought, that is, they do not tell where the fault usually lies; and thirdly, they do not speak out clearly, but express themselves confusedly.

1. According to St. Francis de Sales ("Introduction to a Devout Life," Part II. Chap. XIX.), it is necessary that those who wish to purify their souls thoroughly in order to attain

perfection, should bestow every care to disclose exactly to their spiritual physician even the least faults or imperfections of which they desire to be healed. He recommends also that we, from time to time, disclose to our confessor, not only every sin, but also the state of our inclinations. Nevertheless, those who frequently confess, and have only venial sins to accuse themselves of, do well usually to accuse themselves principally of three or four of them, by which they fear to displease God most and which they deem most urgent to confess, and then to accuse the others in general. This supposes that one is sure he has only venial sins to confess. In this case, we may confess some of them, omitting the less prominent, in order the more earnestly and fervently to turn our attention to the former and combat them, the more vigorously and the more certainly to extirpate them. To

wish every time to mention all and everything in particular divides our attention, robs us of our mind's freedom, and not seldom makes our accusation a torment and a heavy burden.

"In confession," says St. Francis de Sales, "we should not confound the involuntary emotions of our souls with actual sins. For if we were to say, 'I accuse myself of having been violently tempted to anger for several days, but did not yield,' we would confess our virtues instead of our sins. A temptation courageously combated is an exercise of its opposite virtue. Let us avoid all superfluous accusations, to which certain persons are accustomed, such as,— I did not love God as much as I should; I did not pray with as much devotion as I ought; I did not love my neighbor; I did not receive the sacraments with as much reverence as I ought, and the like. In

saying such things we do not accuse ourselves of anything definite, by which the confessor is able to judge of the state of our soul. The most perfect man on earth could say the same things, and even the saints in heaven could say them also, if they were to confess concerning their life on earth.

2. Another fault consists in not saying what we ought. There are some who accuse themselves of very many little things, but leave out what is more important. If we wish to be sincere, we should confess principally those sins which most trouble and disturb our conscience. Others conceal certain faults, about which, as they believe, the confessor, in order to know them better, would question them, if he thought of it and did not fear to annoy them, *e.g.*, about the manner in which they profited by the counsels he previously gave them. If we are sincere, we shall answer with great

simplicity the confessor's questions. He may have good reasons to wish to know certain things concerning our soul, which seem not to belong strictly to confession. The better he knows the circumstances in which we are, our character, our habits, our employments, our connections, our inclinations, etc., the better he can direct us. He knows best what questions he should put to us in order to find out all these things.

3. The want of definiteness and clearness sometimes proceeds from a lack of sincerity. Some persons also feel confused and find difficulty in expressing themselves clearly, either because they are too anxious or because they feel embarrassed. They cannot confess a sin without going into all kinds of unnecessary details and explanations. The reason of this is that sometimes they do not sufficiently trust the judgment of the confessor, and imagine he does not

know them so well as they know themselves. In fine, the want of clearness in the accusation of sins sometimes arises from a hidden pride. We intend, indeed, to humble ourselves, and yet in our accusation we wish to make a good impression about ourselves on the mind of the confessor. We say much, but he cannot tell whether we accuse or excuse ourselves.

4. Before approaching the confessor, we should, whilst he is hearing the confession of the person preceding us, briefly repeat the act of contrition and recite the *Confiteor* in a spirit of humility and penitence. When kneeling at his feet and receiving his blessing, we should say, "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned." After we have accused ourselves of our sins, we should not examine whether we have any more to confess, but pay close attention to what the confessor tells or asks us and to the penance he im-

poses upon us. Let us, then, in spirit place ourselves in the wounds of Jesus Christ, uniting our contrition with His sufferings, whilst the merits of His precious Blood are applied to our soul by the priest's absolution, and receive this priceless benefit with gratitude and love, as if coming from His very lips. "After confession," says St. Francis de Sales, "is not the time to examine whether we rightly accused ourselves of our sins. It simply sufficed to confess the sins that we remembered during confession. If we duly prepared ourselves and did our best, we need not think any more upon them after confession. We should endeavor to keep our soul tranquil, and beware of leaving an opening for anxiety about our examination, contrition and accusation. Such anxiety is an insinuation of the devil, trying to change into bitterness the sacrament of consolation and love."

V. The penances imposed in the confession of devotion.

Let us willingly, punctually and fervently perform the penance imposed by the confessor. The most suitable time for this is, if practicable, immediately after confession. If not practicable, and the confessor has not prescribed the time for its performance, the penance may be deferred to a more opportune time; but we should be careful not to forget it. Those who are drawn by divine grace ardently to desire to make progress in perfection, may, now and then, request the confessor to impose on them penances more severe than usual, *e.g.*, what, from pious motives, they are willing to perform, or what they are sometimes tempted or inclined to omit, and the like. Since it is certain that venial sin deserves the pains of purgatory, and that the least pain of purgatory surpasses all earthly pains, the confessor, know-

ing his penitent's fervor, will sometimes condescend to his penitent's desire, apart from the reason that all good works, etc., performed or satisfaction imposed in the sacrament of Penance, are far more meritorious than those performed of one's free choice. In order to quicken in us the spirit of penance, let us often consider that the light penance imposed by the confessor does not always, even when well performed, remit all the temporal penalties due to our sins. The Church is satisfied, in order to grant us absolution, if we submit to penances proportionate to our sins. But the divine justice places a far stricter relation between sin and its punishment. In the sacrament of Penance we are subjected only to moderate and light works of satisfaction, lest we should be unwilling to perform more difficult ones, and thus fall into a fresh sin.

VI. The prayers after the confession of devotion.

After confession we should spend some time in recollection at the feet of Jesus Christ, and there consider ourselves as having been relieved of a heavy burden. Near Jesus Christ and in His presence we enjoy the consolation and peace of a conscience, which no longer has anything to reproach itself with, and which feels morally certain of God's forgiveness. — Let us thank the Lord for having instituted in His Church so effective and powerful a remedy against all human weaknesses. — Let us implore Him never to permit that we abuse, to our ruin, His willingness to receive us whenever we return to Him. We should next encourage ourselves faithfully to keep our resolutions, and seek to confirm those that we consider as most necessary for us, and then invoke the saints towards whom we

have a special devotion to intercede for us. After this, if we have time, we should perform the penance imposed upon us. We should be careful not to repeat it several times under the pretext of performing it better, for this is not the will of Jesus Christ or of His priest. On leaving the church, we ought to represent Jesus Christ to ourselves as saying to us, "Now that thou art healed, go in peace and sin no more."

But what should we do if, before holy Communion, we feel disturbed about a sin we forgot, or about some little fault committed after confession, or when, for some reason or another, we fear we are not in a disposition fit to receive holy Communion? We should make an act of contrition, and, in obedience to our confessor, or rather to Jesus Christ in the person of our confessor, go tranquilly to holy Communion without disturbing ourselves. We ought to approach our Lord

and Saviour with confidence and receive Him with love, persuaded that the act of contrition and our obedience supply the place of a good confession.

CHAPTER VIII.

Holy Communion.

1. *What St. Alphonsus says of Holy Communion* ("True Spouse of Jesus Christ," Chap. XVIII., Sec. III.). Of all the sacraments the adorable sacrament of the altar is the most excellent. The other sacraments contain the gifts of God, but the Holy Eucharist contains God Himself. Hence St. Thomas says that the other sacraments have been instituted by Jesus Christ to prepare men either to receive or to administer the Blessed Eucharist, which is the consummation of the spiritual life, because from this sacrament is derived all the perfection of the soul. For all perfection consists in a union with God;

and of all the means of uniting the soul to Him there is none more effective than holy Communion, by which the soul becomes, as it were, one with Him, for Christ Himself says, "He that eateth My flesh, . . . abideth in Me and I in him" (John vi. 57).

Our Saviour instituted this sacrament under the form of food to show that, as corporal food is changed into our flesh, so this heavenly bread becomes one thing with us; but with this difference, that earthly food is converted into our substance, whilst this divine bread transforms those who eat it into Jesus Christ. Wherefore Rupert puts these words into our Lord's mouth, "Eat, and you shall be by grace what I am by nature." And this is what our Lord deigned one day to say to St. Augustine, "I will not be changed into you, but you shall be changed into Me." And St. Paul says also, "I live, now not I, but Christ liveth

in me" (Gal. ii. 20). The principal effect of this sacrament is to preserve in the soul the life of grace. Hence it is called bread; for, as earthly bread supports the life of the body, so this heavenly bread preserves the life of the soul, which consists in the grace of God.

The Eucharist is, according to the Council of Trent, the divine medicine that purifies the soul from venial and preserves it from mortal sins. Like a stream of water, this sacrament extinguishes the ardor of the passions consuming us. If he, whose soul is all aglow with the fire of some particular passion, approaches holy Communion, he will find the passion, if not altogether, at least in a great measure, extinguished. "If," says St. Bernard, "any of you no longer experience so frequent or so violent motions of anger, of envy or of lust, let him give thanks to the Body of the Lord that pro-

duces fruit in his soul." The Angelic Doctor teaches that holy Communion imparts strength to us "to repel every assault of the demons." This sacrament, moreover, infuses into the soul great interior peace, a strong inclination to virtue, and a great willingness to practise it, and thus renders it easy to walk in the path of perfection.

Holy Communion, as St. Thomas teaches, infuses divine charity into the heart. Jesus Christ declared that He came into the world for no other purpose than to kindle in our souls the holy fire of divine love. "I came to cast fire on the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?" (Luke xii. 49.) The Venerable Father Olympio, of the Order of Theatines, was wont to say, that there is no mystery of redemption more apt to inflame us with the love of Jesus Christ, than the sacrament of the altar, in which He gives Himself entirely to us, and

pours forth all His love. Hence, speaking of the institution of this sacrament, St. John says, "Jesus, knowing that His hour was come to pass from this world to His Father, when He had loved His friends who were in the world, He loved them even to the end" (John xiii. 1). "He loved them to the end" means, according to the commentators, that He loved them to the utmost of His power. Hence the Council of Trent said that in this sacrament Jesus "poured forth, as it were, all the riches of His divine love towards men." St. Thomas calls holy Communion "the sacrament of love" and St. Bernard terms it "the love of loves." St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi used to call the day of Communion "the day of love," and said that a soul, after holy Communion, might exclaim with Jesus dying on the cross, "It is consummated" (John xix. 30); for, "after giving Himself

to me, God has nothing more to give me; nor can I desire anything else from Him."

Should not all, then, ardently desire to receive Jesus as often as possible in holy Communion? The sentiment of the Church may be inferred from the Council of Trent, which expresses a strong desire that all the faithful present at holy Mass should receive holy Communion. The practice of frequent and even of daily Communion was always praised by the holy Fathers. Pope Innocent XI. exhorts the bishops of those places in which the faithful communicate every day, to give God thanks for such a privilege, and to cherish by all means in their power so useful a devotion, and commands that the reception of Communion be left to the discretion of one's confessor. Our Lord once said to a holy nun, "If you receive holy Communion frequently, I will forget all your ingratitude." The Venerable Father

Antony Torres after death appeared in glory to a certain person, and said that his beatitude in heaven had been increased, because he had recommended frequent Communion to his penitents. Frequent Communion is that which is received several times a week.

According to St. Thomas, it is certain that frequent and even daily Communion is in itself most useful, but only for those who have the proper dispositions, and not indiscriminately for all that are in the state of grace. "Receive daily," says St. Augustine, "that it may every day be profitable to you; but live in such a manner, that you may be worthy to receive every day." A person that commits deliberate venial sins, or that is guilty of faults which he knows to hinder his advancement in perfection, and that does not endeavor to correct these defects, should not be permitted to communicate more frequently than once a week. For my part,

I should have great difficulty in allowing frequent Communion to persons disposed to persevere in any defect, which, though not clearly a venial sin, would be certainly contrary to perfection, especially if it were a defect against humility or obedience. But if a person has no affection for any venial sin, if he abstains from deliberate venial sins and attends to prayer and the mortification of his passions and senses, the confessor may permit him to communicate three, four, or even five times a week. And when a person has attained a considerable degree of perfection, when he spends several hours a day in mental prayer, and has, moreover, conquered the greater part of his evil inclinations, he may, according to St. Francis de Sales, be allowed to receive holy Communion every day. St. Thomas teaches that "if any one finds by experience that by daily Communion the fervor of his love is

increased, and his reverence not diminished, such a person ought to communicate every day." Hence, in permitting more or less frequent Communion to his penitents, a confessor should be regulated by the fruits of their Communions.

Listen to the words of St. Francis de Sales: "If worldlings ask you why you communicate so often, tell them that two classes of persons should communicate frequently; the perfect, to preserve perfection, and the imperfect, to attain perfection; the strong, that they may not become weak, and the weak, that they may grow strong; the sick, that they may be cured, and the healthy, that they may not get sick. And as to yourself, tell them that because you are imperfect, weak and infirm, you stand in need of frequent Communion."

2. *Preparation for Holy Communion.* The Blessed Eucharist is, in a special manner, the

food of our soul. St. Augustine says that, when we ask God to give us this day our daily bread, we ask principally for holy Communion, which should constitute the daily nourishment of our soul. In this sacrament God "has made a remembrance of all His wonderful works" (Ps. cx. 4). It sums up all the wonders of His infinite love for us. It is the greatest gift that God can bestow, for He cannot give anything greater than Himself. We ought to hunger and thirst after this bread of angels, after this "wine that produces virgins" (Zach. ix. 17). We ought to receive our Lord frequently, as often as we are permitted. "Holy Communion," says St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, "is our greatest possible action." It, therefore, demands great and careful preparation on our part. How happy were St. Martha and Zacheus to receive Jesus Christ into their house! How happy would we not feel,

if He were to come in person to visit us in our house, in our convent! What preparations would we not make to receive Him in a becoming manner! How carefully would we not cleanse and polish the whole building and put everything in order! We would, moreover, spare no pains to decorate, to the best of our ability, the whole building, so as to render it as fit as possible to receive so great a Guest. When, however, there is question of receiving Jesus Christ into our soul, we should most assuredly leave nothing undone to render it worthy of receiving Him. It, then, behooves us, above all, carefully to purify our conscience. It were a thousand times better not to receive holy Communion at all, than to commit the horrid crime of sacrilege of profaning the Body and Blood of our Redeemer, and thus eating and drinking our own condemnation.

But, while dreading sacrilege above every other evil, we should not be too scrupulous and omit holy Communion for every trifle, for a little fault that can be effaced by an act of contrition, of humility, of mortification, or of charity. We should not for the whole world wilfully lose a holy Communion. "A wilful omission of holy Communion," says St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, "is a great injustice against divine love, and may deprive us of necessary special graces." This is one of the points on which St. Alphonsus insists the most in his correspondence with his penitents; he threatens to give up directing their souls, if they will not obey him and receive holy Communion as often as he prescribes.

But those who frequently receive holy Communion should be very holy. "He who often receives holy Communion," says St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, "should be so

filled with holy indifference and so resigned to the divine will and that of his superiors, that no one may be able to discover his likes and dislikes. Nothing imparts greater perfection to the soul than holy Communion. A single Communion well made is sufficient to make us saints." The reason why we do not obtain such happy results from our holy Communion, is because we carelessly make, or even omit, our immediate preparation for it. The fruits of our holy Communions are always proportionate to the fervor of our preparation. We should, then, strive with all possible earnestness to prepare ourselves for so great an action, beginning to do so already on the eve of our holy Communion.

In the first place, we should excite within us the most lively faith, believing most firmly in the real presence, and most vividly representing to ourselves the great happiness

holy Communion has in store for us, since it will most intimately unite us with the God of heaven and earth, with our loving Redeemer, with the Beloved of our heart, who will dwell therein and bestow on us His choicest graces. Let us pray for an increase of faith — that first and most necessary of virtues, which is now especially necessary, since our fervor in the reception of this adorable Sacrament will be proportionate to the liveliness and intensity of our faith. Were our faith in holy Communion and its advantages as ardent as it ought to be, we would not remain so cold or so lukewarm at the thought of receiving our loving Jesus.

In the next place, we should deeply humble ourselves as entirely unworthy of so inestimable a favor on account of our misery and sinfulness. This sentiment of humility will incite us to make repeated acts of the sincerest contrition for our sins, of regret for

our base ingratitude, and of the firm resolution rather to suffer all, and even death itself, than again offend God; and it will also urge to do all in our power henceforth to serve Him with the utmost fidelity. Being, however, aware of our extreme spiritual weakness and helplessness, we shall naturally be led to place all our confidence in the divine goodness and mercy, and to expect great things from Him who is so soon to give Himself to us. Our confidence should be boundless, for the number and effectiveness of the graces we receive in holy Communion are always in proportion to the confidence with which we approach our loving Saviour. Our confidence is the vessel into which He pours His favors, says St. Bernard. Jesus will surely fill the vessel of our confidence when He comes to us; but He will give us only as much as it can contain. Let us, then, greatly dilate our heart

and expand our confidence, so as to secure an abundance of graces.

In the next place, we should strive to excite in our heart the tenderest love for Jesus Christ, who loves us so greatly as to give Himself to us. In fact, His love for us is so excessive, that it would seem as if He could not do enough to win our miserable love. To show His love for us, He was not content to die for us, but He has gone so far as to feed us in this Sacrament with His own flesh and blood. Let us, then, love Him with our whole undivided heart. — Lastly, we should desire most eagerly, yearn most intensely, to receive the Blessed Eucharist. Our longing for it should be so great as to consume us. We should experience a ravenous hunger, a burning thirst for this heavenly food and drink. We should be like St. Catherine of Siena, who every morning felt like one famished, until she

had received her divine Spouse. We should so long for this Bread of Angels, as scarcely to be able to wait until the happy moment arrives when Jesus gives Himself to us.

Whilst we are receiving Jesus Christ, how eagerly, lovingly, and tenderly we should welcome Him as our only love, as the beloved Spouse of our soul, as our all, and with what transports of the deepest and most intense love and joy should we not embrace Him!

3. *Thanksgiving after Holy Communion.* Having received Jesus, let us thank Him with our whole heart, and prolong our conversation with Him as long as obedience permits. We should not lose a single one of those precious moments during which Jesus is personally within us. "Holy Communion," says St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, "is the greatest treasure we can possess. After receiving Jesus we ought to

be forgetful of everything else, just as if we were alone in the world with Jesus." Having welcomed our divine Spouse with the tenderest affection, we should express astonishment at His condescending to enter our miserable heart. Let us, then, in the most lively manner, reanimate our faith in His presence within us, and with the most ardent love express our gratitude to Him for His infinite goodness and condescension in thus giving Himself to us, and let us unite ourselves most intimately with Him. Having done this, we should listen to Him saying to us, "My child, give me thy heart" (Prov. xxiii. 26). Let us then comply with His desire, and consecrate ourselves wholly and unreservedly to Him, giving Him our heart and all its affections, and our whole being, and most fervently renewing the vows of our profession (or our baptismal vows). After doing this with all possible sincerity

and earnestness, let us imitate Zacheus, who, to express his gratitude for our Lord's visit to his house, made and executed various good resolutions. In like manner, we should make good resolutions appropriate to our spiritual wants, taking care to specify them. Although we should not make too many, we should, nevertheless, be generous. Perhaps some heavy cross, or trial, is oppressing us, and making us discontented and despondent, and inciting us to murmurs and complaints, and rendering us miserable and unhappy. Now, then, is the time to show to Jesus our generosity and gratitude for His boundless love and generosity in our regard. Now is the time for us cheerfully and lovingly to accept this cross, this burden, this trial. Let us now tell our loving Jesus that, for His sake, we will cheerfully bear this cross, and other crosses also, if it so please Him to make a trial of our love; but

that He should mercifully strengthen our weakness.

Having thus proved that our love and gratitude do not consist in vain words and protestations, we may now in all confidence make petitions for ourselves and others. But we ought to ask our divine Saviour for *great* things, such as the forgiveness of our sins, the gift of divine love, a boundless confidence in His merits and in Mary's intercession, the grace to pray well and to become a saint, and final perseverance. Let us entreat Him to tear out of our heart every affection and every attachment to creatures. After this let us pray for our companions in religion, for our superiors, our relatives, friends, benefactors, enemies, poor sinners, the souls in purgatory, the sick and the afflicted, those who are in their agony, those for whom we have promised to pray, and those who have recommended themselves

or been recommended to our prayers. We should try to spend the whole day in sweet joy at the remembrance of the gracious visit of our loving Spouse, and to carry out faithfully the promises we have made Him.

A holy Communion, well made, is the best preparation for the next one. To draw greater profit from our holy Communions we should strive, in our preparation, to enter into the dispositions that would animate us, if we knew that this were to be our last holy Communion, and that we should die immediately after it and be summoned before the formidable tribunal of Jesus Christ. Oh! if this were to be the case, how carefully and fervently would we not prepare for that great action, and how eagerly and lovingly would we not receive that pledge of life eternal!

CHAPTER IX.

Spiritual Communion — Visit to the Blessed Sacrament.

I. St. Alphonsus on Spiritual Communion ("Spouse of Christ," Chap. XVIII., Sec. III.).

Spiritual Communion, as St. Thomas says, consists in an ardent desire to receive Jesus Christ in the holy Sacrament. The holy Council of Trent extols the advantages of spiritual Communion, and exhorts the faithful to practise it. And God Himself has several times given devout souls to understand how pleasing it is to Him to receive Him spiritually. Jesus Christ appeared one day to Sister Paula Maresca and showed her two precious ves-

sels, one of gold and another of silver, saying to her, that in the former He preserved her sacramental Communions, and her spiritual Communions in the latter. On a certain occasion He said to the Venerable Jane of the Cross, that, as often as she communicated spiritually, she received a grace similar to that which she derived from her sacramental Communions.

Father Peter Faber, S.J., was wont to say that spiritual Communions are a very powerful help to receive the Holy Eucharist with the proper dispositions. Blessed Angela of the Cross used to make a hundred spiritual Communions every day and a hundred more every night. But how could she make so many? St. Augustine answers, "Give me one that loves, and he understands what I say." Give me a soul that loves nothing but Jesus Christ, and she will not wonder at it. Nothing is easier than to

make several spiritual Communions every day, for it is not necessary to be fasting, to have a priest, or to spend much time. Hence we may make a spiritual Communion as often as we please in the day. Be careful, then, to make frequent spiritual Communions in your meditations, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and take particular care, whenever you hear Mass, to make a spiritual Communion during the Communion of the priest. The spiritual Communion may be made thus: —

Spiritual Communion. My Jesus, I believe that Thou art truly and really present in the holy Sacrament. I love Thee with my whole heart, and because I love Thee, I am sorry for having offended Thee. Since I cannot now receive Thee sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace Thee, as if Thou hadst really come, and I give myself entirely to Thee; do

not permit me to be ever separated from Thee.

II. St. Alphonsus on visits to the Blessed Sacrament (*Ibid.*).

The souls that love Jesus Christ derive great help from frequent visits to Him in the Sacrament of His love. The holy Church instituted and celebrates the festival of the adorable Sacrament with so much solemnity in honor not only of holy Communion, but also of the loving dwelling of Jesus Christ night and day in our churches. When our dear Saviour left this world, He did not wish to leave us alone, and therefore He devised a means of remaining with us in the Holy Eucharist to the end of time, that even here below we may enjoy His sweet company. He gives audience to all whenever they wish. "In order to animate us to approach Him with greater confidence," says St. Teresa, "He has clothed Himself

with the species of bread in this Sacrament, and thus has veiled His majesty, that we may not be terrified at the sight of it."

But how many insults must Jesus Christ have suffered from infidels, from heretics, and from sinners in this Sacrament, in order to remain with us. He foresaw all these injuries; but He, nevertheless, resolved to remain with us on the altar, that we might not be deprived of His amiable presence. The saints experienced no greater delight on earth than that which they enjoyed in the presence of the most holy Sacrament. St. Teresa said one day from heaven to one of her religious: "We who rejoice in heaven, and you who suffer on earth, should be alike in purity and love. And what we do in heaven before the divine Essence, you should do on earth before the most holy Sacrament." And what greater paradise can a religious that loves Jesus Christ find on

this earth than to remain at His feet, to manifest the love he bears Him, to offer himself to Him, to make known his desires, in order the more ardently to love Him?

But this paradise religious can enjoy in a special manner. It is true that Jesus remains in the holy Sacrament for all; but He remains particularly for religious, who enjoy His society day and night within their own house. Religious, then, do not need to leave their dwelling in order to enjoy His society. They should visit Him as often as possible, and their hearts should remain with Him to burn continually, and with greater splendor than the lights and lamps decorating the altar. Our Lord thus complained of the ingratitude of men and of religious to Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque, when He showed her His divine Heart burning with flames of love for men, saying: "Behold the Heart that has loved men so

tenderly and has consumed itself in order to show its love for them. But in return I receive in this Sacrament nothing but ingratitude and contempt from the greater number of men. But what displeases Me most is, that some of these ungrateful hearts are hearts consecrated to Me."

If you have hitherto been negligent in visiting Jesus in the tabernacle, I entreat you henceforth to avail yourself of the great treasure you have in the most holy Sacrament. Sister Anne of the Cross, being asked how she was employed during the many hours she was wont to spend daily before the Blessed Sacrament, replied, "I thank Him, I love Him, and I ask for His graces." Behold an excellent means of drawing great fruit from your visits to the Blessed Sacrament. First, thank Jesus Christ for His great goodness in coming to remain on the altar for the love of you.

Secondly, love Him, for in that prison of love He is burning with love for you; hence make repeated acts of love, offering yourself to Him in a special manner.

Thirdly, ask for His graces. Beg of Him to give you strength to resist temptations, to correct the faults into which you habitually relapse, to rescue you from the passion that hinders you from giving yourself entirely to God. Beseech Him to help you to increase in your heart His divine love and particularly to enable you to live always united with His holy will. When you feel disturbed after having committed a fault, go at once to the holy Sacrament to ask pardon, and then calm your mind. When you have been offended or when you meet with a heavy cross, go and offer it all to Jesus, and beg Him for strength to embrace it with resignation. Oh! if all religious were to do this, they would all become saints.

CHAPTER X.

Purity of Intention.

(St. Alphonsus, "Spouse of Christ," Chap. XIX.)

Purity of intention consists in performing all our actions through the sole motive of pleasing God. The good or bad intention with which an act is performed makes the act good or bad in the sight of God. "If," said our Lord, "thy eye be single, thy whole body shall be lightsome. But if thy eye be evil, thy whole body will be darksome" (Mat. vi. 22). If our intention be simple, that is, if we have no other object than to please God, our works are good and resplendent with the light of purity; but if our intention be twofold, that is, if any

vicious end enters into our actions, they are sinful. Holy simplicity admits no other end than the pleasure of God. Hence a pure intention is the soul of our actions; it gives them life and renders them pleasing in the sight of God.

The value of an act, according to men, increases in proportion to the time spent in its performance; but, before God, the value of an act increases in proportion to the purity of intention with which it is performed. "For man seeth those things that appear, but the Lord beholdeth the heart" (1 Kings xvi. 7). St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi was wont to say that God rewards our actions in proportion to the purity of our intention of pleasing Him. Of the poor widow who put her two mites into the treasury of the temple, into which others had cast large sums, our Saviour said, "Amen, I say to you, this poor widow hath

cast in more than all they who have cast into the treasury" (Mark xii. 41). St. Cyprian, explaining this passage, says that by these words our Lord meant that he regards not so much the action that is performed, as the affection and the purity of intention with which it is performed. St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi used to say to her novices, "Never seek yourselves in any of your exercises." A religious who seeks himself in his actions, by performing them for the sake of praise or self-satisfaction, imitates him who puts the wages of his labor into a bag full of holes. "Take heed," says our Lord, "that you do not your justice before men, to be seen by them" (Mat. vi. 1).

Marks of a Pure Intention. The first mark is, if, when your undertaking has not been successful, you are not disturbed, but remain as tranquil as if you had attained your object. This will certainly be the case, when-

ever you have acted only for God; because when you see that He has not wished your efforts to be crowned with success, neither will you wish it; for you know that He demands an account, not of the success or failure of your undertaking, but of the purity of your intention.

The second is, to rejoice at the good done by others, as if it had been done by yourself. He that seeks nothing but the divine glory, cares not whether it is promoted by another or by himself.

The third mark is, not to desire one office more than another, one occupation more than another, but to be content with whatever obedience prescribes; because you then seek in everything only the pleasure of God.

The fourth mark is, not to desire approbation or thanks for your good works, but to remain, even when unduly censured, in the same tranquillity of mind, satisfied with

having pleased God, since this was your sole aim.

It is better and safer to act through the motive of doing the will of God, than with the intention of promoting His glory, because we shall thus escape the delusions of self-love. Under the pretence of seeking the glory of God, we often do our own will; but when we endeavor to do the divine will — duly manifested to us — and what is most pleasing to God, we can never err. Let us be persuaded, that the greatest glory we can give to God consists in doing His will. It was thus our Saviour always acted, for He says, "I seek not My own will, but the will of Him that sent Me" (John v. 30); "I do always the things that please Him" (John viii. 29). Hence it was justly said of Him that He did all things well. And, remarks St. John Chrysostom, "if we imitate His example, and succeed in pleasing God,

what else need we seek?" Does it appear to you a small thing, that you, a miserable creature, should be able to give pleasure to God?

Let us be persuaded that God does not demand of us great things, but only that we present Him the little we do with a pure intention. St. Augustine says, that if, because you are poor, you have nothing to give to God, your will affords much to give Him, if you offer him what you do through the sole motive of pleasing Him. "No price," says the Venerable Beatrix of the Incarnation, "can be an equivalent for the smallest action done for God."

Be careful from the moment you awake in the morning to direct all the actions of the day to God, offering them in union with the actions of our Saviour during His mortal life. Endeavor to renew your intention at least at the beginning of every principal

action, such as your meditations, Communions, hearing Mass, work or study, meals and recreation, saying always, at least mentally, "Lord, in this action I intend not my own pleasure, but only the accomplishment of Thy will." "Consider," says St. Eusebius, "that you have lived only those days on which your actions have had the light of purity;" that is, on which your actions have been performed through the sole motive of pleasing God.

CHAPTER XI.

Meditation on the Present State of Our Soul.

Preparatory Prayer, p. 60.

First Prelude. Vividly imagine yourself standing before the throne of the divine Majesty.

Second Prelude. Pray to God for light to appreciate the value of the graces and benefits hitherto received, and to acknowledge and repent of the malice of your past faults and sins, and to make appropriate resolutions.

I. Point. Consider the benefits thou hast received this month (this week), and especially perseverance in thy vocation, the nu-

merous powerful means of perfection, thy daily spiritual exercises — such as meditation, examens of conscience, spiritual reading, visit to the Blessed Sacrament, the frequent reception of the sacraments, the constant watchfulness and direction of thy superiors, the good example of thy companions, the many divine inspirations, preservation from grievous sins, the diminution of the number of venial sins, the greater ease in overcoming temptations, a more ardent love of thy vocation, increased facility in overcoming the difficulties and obstacles of perfection. "It is true, the Lord is good, and His mercy endureth forever. — What shall I render to the Lord for all that He has rendered to me?"

II. Point. Investigate the present state of thy soul, and especially how thou hast conducted thyself and what care thou didst bestow on thy ordinary daily exercises.

1. *How hast thou behaved towards God?* What courage, what desire didst thou feel and nourish in thyself for the attainment of perfection? How didst thou perform thy spiritual exercises? Didst thou experience therein greater devotion and consolation than formerly, or, at least, didst thou show more zeal and endurance? Or didst thou rather experience desolation and dryness, or even relax in fervor and fidelity? In keeping thy vows and rules, was thy motive love or fear? Hast thou not failed to make that progress in perfection which, with God's help, thou couldst have made? Reflect on some special occasions of so doing which presented themselves to thee.

2. *What has been thy conduct towards thy Superiors?* Didst thou always endeavor to consider Jesus Christ Himself in the person of thy superiors? Didst thou always show them due respect and love? Didst thou

willingly, humbly and perfectly obey thy superiors of inferior rank? And this without murmur, without excuse, without pretexting difficulties? Wert thou open-hearted and sincere towards thy superior, or didst thou act deceitfully towards him?

3. *How hast thou conducted thyself towards thy Companions in Religion?* Didst thou sincerely love them all and prefer them to thyself? Didst thou not wound fraternal charity and concord? Hast thou no particular affection for some one? Dost thou entertain an aversion for some one? Didst thou strive by true humility, simplicity, patience, discretion, love and modesty to render thyself amiable before God and men? Didst thou endeavor to preserve peace of heart? Wast thou considerate in speech and in intercourse with others?

4. *How hast thou fulfilled thy personal duties?* Didst thou love poverty as a mother?

Didst thou cheerfully bear its privations? Wast thou always content to get the poorest in all things? Didst thou desire it? Didst thou exert thyself to preserve purity of body and soul? Didst thou at once strive to suppress all impure thoughts and representations? Didst thou carefully watch over thy senses? Didst thou, without or against the will of thy superiors, exceed in acts of exterior mortification, or show thyself negligent therein?

Wast thou diligent and careful in thy daily duties? Didst thou rise in the morning at the very first sound of the bell? Didst thou then at once raise thy thoughts to God, to the subject of thy particular examen, of thy meditation? Didst thou endeavor to preserve recollection of mind? Didst thou say thy morning prayers attentively? Didst thou make a good meditation? Didst thou assist at holy Mass with

reverence and devotion? Didst thou recite well thy usual prayers? Didst thou observe moderation at thy meals? Didst thou mortify thy appetite in some small thing? Didst thou pay attention to the reading at table? How didst thou spend the time of recreation? Didst thou try to keep up and promote therein spiritual conversation? Didst thou make thy spiritual reading well? Didst thou carefully make the two examens of conscience?

After thus examining thyself compare thy present with thy past state. If thou perceivest that thou hast made some progress, thank God for it, and resolve to be henceforth as conscientious and to strive to make still greater progress. If, however, the contrary has been the case, resolve earnestly to amend and to make up for thy deficiencies.

Finally, beseech our divine Saviour and His Blessed Mother to deign to preserve

thee in fervor. "The most effective means to persevere in good and to make progress in the spiritual life," says St. Francis de Sales, "consists in frequently calling to mind what we promised to God in the days of our primitive fervor after mature deliberation. If he who, from time to time, renews his good resolutions is not wholly free from faults, what will become of him who never, or only very seldom, renews them?"

CHAPTER XII.

How to make our Monthly Recollection, together with the Preparation for Death.

The object of this pious exercise, which is usually made on the first or the last Sunday of every month, is, first, to discover not only our faults but their roots and sources also, and to examine whether we have made any progress in virtue; secondly, to seek the necessary means of amendment and progress; and thirdly, to dispose our will to practise conscientiously our good resolutions.

When thou art at leisure, go in presence of the Blessed Sacrament, or else retire to thy room, kneel and, according to the direc-

tions given in the preceding chapter, try to find out the state of thy soul, asking thyself and sincerely answering the following questions: —

1. To what faults and sins am I mostly subject?

2. How have I kept and executed my good resolutions? What is the occasion or source of my want of fidelity?

3. Have I a good intention in all my actions? Am I not led by human respect? Have I a particular affection or friendship for some one?

4. Do I punctually, conscientiously and fervently discharge the duties of my office?

Keep a correct account of the faults thou now discoverest and compare it with that of the previous month. Excite a hearty sorrow for these faults, and, at the next occasion, confess the most important ones and consult thy confessor concerning them. At a visit

to the Blessed Sacrament and at thy next holy Communion offer thy resolutions to our Lord, beg for grace to put them into practice, and recommend thyself to the Blessed Virgin and to the saints of thy Order.

CHAPTER XIII.

Consideration for the Anniversary of One's Entrance into the Religious State.

This great day reminds us of three considerations well worthy of our attention.

I. Why did I enter this holy state? God called me to it by a very special grace, that I might be saved therein. I entered with no other intention than to sanctify myself. I was then firmly resolved to coöperate with the grace of my vocation, and most conscientiously to fulfil all its duties. This holy place opened its doors to receive me, hoping I would be an honor to it and would gather for myself an abundance of merits.

Such were the designs of God; such the sentiments of my heart; such the hopes of this holy Institute. Nothing, then, seemed difficult or painful to me; everything appeared sweet and easy. Happy days! why have I not constantly preserved you with me? O that my sentiments were now as holy and as noble as formerly! "Who will grant that I might be according to the months past; according to the days in which God kept me? . . . As I was in the days of my youth, when God was secretly in my tabernacle? When the Almighty was with me" (Job xxix. 2–5).

II. What have I done since my entrance into this holy state? Do I correspond to God's designs over me, and remain faithful to my vocation? Have I always fulfilled His most holy will? Have I always followed His divine inspirations? Have I always responded to what He had the

right to expect of me? Have I, after receiving so many graces in religion, become more fervent and more holy? What have I as yet done for God? What vices have I extirpated? What virtues have I sown? What sacrifices have I made for His sake? What victories have I won over myself? Have I made any real progress in the ways of God, in which I should have constantly and courageously walked?

In the meantime what graces have I not received, and how little fruit have they produced in me? Alas! I have nothing to show but many good desires and very little fruit; nothing but many generous resolutions and very few of them fulfilled; nothing but numerous invitations on the part of God and so little correspondence on my part. If henceforth I do not more earnestly attend to myself, my whole life will glide away fruitlessly and, at the end

of my course, I shall find myself as tepid, as careless, and as slothful as I now am, or even still more unfaithful and imperfect. Alas! when I entered this holy Institute, I was so fervent, so generous, so eager for perfection; and now — how disgraceful for me!

III. What can be more important for me than to resume my first fervor? Yes, Lord, I understand it now. It is now time and most necessary for me to enter seriously into myself, and to renew myself completely and resume my first fervor. Yes, Lord, I now renew my former resolutions of sanctifying myself at any and every cost: —

1. I renew these resolutions in a spirit of gratitude for the infinitely great graces Thou hast bestowed on me.

2. I renew them in a spirit of penance for all my past faults and unfaithfulness.

3. I renew them in a spirit of fidelity in order henceforth to be more true to Thee in the discharge of my duties and to perform them more punctually.

CHAPTER XIV.

Consideration for the Anniversary of One's Profession.

I. It is already so many years since I belong to God by the vows of religion, and this is the anniversary of the happy day on which I gave myself unreservedly to Him. What did I intend, or should have intended, to do in making my profession? To consecrate myself wholly and unreservedly to God, that I might be all His all the days of my life in this holy state. To Him I consecrated my mind, that I might not think any longer of anything besides Him, that I might occupy myself with nothing but Him, and renounce

all care of things earthly and transitory. To Him I consecrated my heart, that I might love nothing besides Him, that I might love Him alone, and cling to Him alone, and direct to Him alone all my inclinations and affections. To Him I consecrated my body and its senses, that I might make of them so many offerings ready to suffer all, and even death itself, for His love and honor. To Him I consecrated my soul, my whole self, that I might be of the number of His constantly true friends, who have wholly dedicated themselves to His service and already here on earth imitate the angels; in a word, that I might be espoused to Jesus Christ. Such was my object, my intention, when I consecrated myself to God. I then realized the extent of the obligations I assumed, and promised to discharge them most faithfully.

II. But how have I fulfilled these obligations? Here, O Lord, I must judge myself and pass due sentence over myself in accordance with the obligations I so fervently assumed. Am I really a victim wholly and exclusively consecrated to God? Is my soul truly the spouse of Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom? Is my mind occupied with no other object than with Him alone and with His infinite perfections? Does my heart cling to no one else than to Him and His infinite loveliness? Have I offered my body and my senses to Him as a victim? Am I really dead to the world and to myself and to creatures? Has my life been really like that of an angel, and an imitation of Christ's? Is it He alone who has hitherto lived in me and quickened my whole conduct with His spirit? What am I in reality before Him, and how does He look upon me?

CHAPTER XV.

Marks of Tepidity.

1. To recite vocal prayers and make meditation only from habit, without attention, fervor or devotion, and hence without fruit and profit;—not to combat distractions, to defer, interrupt, shorten, or even sometimes entirely omit these exercises without sufficient reason.

2. To make the examinations of conscience only superficially, drowsily, and without real sorrow and earnest resolution.

3. To make practical distinctions between important and unimportant rules, obligations and customs of the Institute, in order frivolously to disregard the so-called little

things, not bearing in mind that it is something great, and not seldom heroic, to be always faithful in little things, and that, as a rule, our fidelity in greater things depends on our previous fidelity in little things.

4. To be occupied willingly in exterior employments, not in order to do good, but out of love of distraction and of eagerness for news, and because one lives in dissipation of mind and is averse to recollection.

5. To be too fond of intercourse with seculars, and to fail therein in religious modesty, dignity and prudence, and to show therein vanity and an unmortified spirit.

6. To be eager for human consolation, to impart to others and to complain to them of one's trials, pains and troubles, and seek only human sympathy and comfort.

7. Willingly to speak of others, of their affairs, and of their faults, uncharitably to

criticise, to find fault with them, not excuse them, to have no esteem for fraternal charity.

8. To consider burdensome and to carry unwillingly the yoke of religious discipline, and especially of obedience; not willingly to submit one's judgment and will and render them conformable to the will and judgment of the superior; to lose one's peace and composure at humiliations and corrections, and not to endeavor to conquer one's self therein.

9. To yield to sensuality in eating and drinking, in sleep,—either out of the proper time or too long,—in sitting down, and in the use of exterior penances; to seek one's ease, not to mortify one's senses and passions.

10. Not carefully to shun the occasions and dangers of sinning.

11. Not willingly to speak or listen to

others speaking of God and on spiritual subjects.

12. Not to heed and obey the inspirations of grace; to commit again and again the same faults without fear and without remorse.

13. To care nothing about one's imperfections and faults, to be indifferent towards one's progress in perfection, or even towards one's vocation; not to use the proper means of sanctification.

14. To go to confession without sincere sorrow and firm purpose of amendment, to receive holy Communion without devotion, reverence, and spiritual hunger, and only from habit; to assist at holy Mass and other divine services without fervor and recollection, and hence to derive from these holy exercises but little or no profit.

15. Willingly to associate with those who lack fervor and who charge all that do not

chime in with them with being scrupulous and excessively worried on account of trifles.

Such are the principal marks of tepidity. The possession of even one of them should be for us a subject of fear. If, however, we possess several or even all of them, there is no longer any doubt of our being in the dangerous state of tepidity.

CHAPTER XVI.

Marks of a Fervent Religious.

The perfection of a religious does not consist, as is sometimes imagined, in undertaking great things, in reciting long prayers, or in sublime contemplation, in practising excessive austerities and mortifications, in performing heroic acts of virtue; in a word, it does not consist in walking in an extraordinary way and distinguishing one's self by a singular mode of life, or by making one's self prominent before the world. We are to seek perfection only in the faithful keeping of our vows and in the strict observance of our rules and constitutions. The following points alone are to be

remarked in the conduct of a fervent religious: —

1. In regard to God the fervent religious punctually performs all his exercises of piety in accordance with the spirit of God and of his holy Institute. Or, to enter more into details, he recites all his vocal prayers with attention, makes his meditations with fervor and his spiritual reading considerately, receives holy Communion with due preparation, and performs all his actions with a pure intention, solely to please and serve God, with inviolable fidelity to grace, with perfect conformity to the divine will, with the most intimate union of his heart with the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ, who deigned to call him to so holy and exalted a state.

2. In regard to his neighbor he is full of respect and esteem in accordance with the divine law and his own conscience; he

is charitable and obliging, meek, patient, and indulgent towards others; bears their ill-humor with composure, excuses their faults, sympathizes with them in their sufferings and trials, forestalls their desires and wishes, most carefully shuns all cutting remarks, bitter complaints, unpleasant retorts, all kinds of dissatisfaction, all coldness and unfeelingness. He seeks occasions to oblige them, to render them service, and this without exacting gratitude in return. He is never more pleased than when he can befriend them. He gives to all a good example, helps and consoles them, and does all he can to contribute to the happiness of those with whom he lives.

3. In regard to himself he is all humility, retirement and watchfulness. In him reigns a constant equanimity with a cheerful peace of mind. He is always perfectly composed and devoid of obstinacy, uneasiness, confu-

sion, pride and arrogance. Without hypocrisy or duplicity he considers himself as the servant of all, and sees in his neighbor Jesus Christ Himself. He neither seeks human applause, nor yields to the cravings of vanity, self-love and self-complacency, and cheerfully devotes himself to promoting the glory of God in whatever place, employment or rank, obedience and divine providence may place him.

In short, a fervent religious shows in his whole conduct and in his actions nothing singular or extraordinary, but he imparts a sublime elevation and value to all his actions and to his whole conduct by his exalted motives, by the wholly divine exercise of an interior and recollected life, of walking in the presence of God, of desire for perfection, and by his consideration and expectation of heavenly bliss.

Thus have many religious lived, *e.g.*,

a St. Aloysius Gonzaga, in whose life there was seen nothing grand or extraordinary, and who, by the exercises of an apparently ordinary life, raised himself to a very high degree of holiness. St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi once beheld him in a vision clothed with brightest glory, at which sight she was so full of astonishment and wonder, that she fell into an ecstasy. How did St. Aloysius reach such a height of virtue and glory? By constant fidelity to grace, by the faithful performance of all his duties, by his "inner and hidden life," so full of treasures of merits, so unknown to the world, but so pleasing to God and richly rewarded by Him.

This grand model urges us to lead a perfect life, and corrects our many former errors concerning piety. It is very consoling to timorous souls, who do not feel strong enough to take a lofty flight like the eagle, but who can gather therefrom the

hope of attaining, even step by step, that degree of perfection to which they are called by their state and the grace of God.

Let us also keep in view this exalted model, that he may serve us as a mirror wherein to contemplate how we may trace in us all his traits and adapt to them our heart, our sentiments and our conduct.

CHAPTER XVII.

Motives for serving God Every Day More and More Fervently.

1. Consider who God is, and how exalted He is, and how very worthy He is of all love and service. He who would esteem his own shadow more than himself, would deserve to be laughed at. And how much greater is the folly of him who prefers a creature to God Himself! Consider with the eyes of faith the love and reverence the angels bear to God, and weigh well these words of the Psalmist, "Lord, who is like unto thee?" (Ps. xxxviii. 10.)

2. Consider what the Son of God has done and suffered for thee, and say with

St. Bernard, "If because God created me, I was already bound to serve Him with all that I am and have, what do I not owe Him for having redeemed me, and this at so great a price?"

3. Consider how, according to God's will and the end of thy Institute, thou art obliged, after thy Saviour's example, to strive to lead a poor, sinless and perfect life. If thou dost not strive to do it, thou art a useless burden to thy Order and to thyself and companions, and, most assuredly, not pleasing to the good God. Art thou not ashamed thus to grieve thy Institute, which has been so good and tender a mother to thee? Wilt thou not be put to confusion for this at the day of judgment?

4. Reflect on the many and great benefits God has conferred on thee. Hadst thou received no other benefit from Him than the vocation to the religious life, thou couldst

not sufficiently thank Him for it by serving Him with all possible fervor. From how many evils, dangers, sins and sinful occasions has He not preserved thee? And how many powerful graces and means of perfection has He not bestowed on thee? What wouldst thou now be, if thou hadst remained in the world? How disgraceful is it not for thee, if, out of gratitude for such excellent unmerited favors, thou dost not serve God with the greatest fervor!

5. Consider that eternal bliss is well worth our serving God most faithfully and fervently. The road thou hast to travel is, indeed, difficult, yet forget not whither it leads. Short are the labors and hardships, but endless are the joys that follow.

6. Consider, on the one hand, the beauty and excellence of virtue, and, on the other, the deformity and loathsomeness of vice and sin.

7. Most vividly call to mind how God has mercifully forgiven thee so many and so grievous sins, and behold therein a powerful incentive to show thyself grateful to Him every day by serving Him fervently.

8. Consider seriously the vanity and brevity of the present life, the endlessness of the next life, the certainty of death, the uncertainty of when it will come; the horrible torments of hell and the ineffable happiness in heaven of those who, during life, earnestly and fervently strive after perfection.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Means against Temptations.

1. Be persuaded that we must undergo temptations, lest we grow careless and lead from day to day a life of levity. Hence in time of peace act prudently, lest thou be unprepared when the evil one assails thee, for he aims at causing men so to live, as if they already enjoyed everlasting peace.

2. Make an act of love of God as soon as thou art aware of being tempted, whether it be against holy purity or against humility, or whether it be only some scruple, or some other suggestion of Satan. Hence say to the devil in mocking: "All right! Thou comest quite opportunely to me. Since

thou comest without being called, I will make use of thee as a means of admonishing and urging me to love God." Thus will the wiles of Satan seeking thy ruin become for thee a food of life, and a source of many merits, so that the fiend will be careful not to come so soon again, seeing that he is made to serve thy soul as an encouragement and an incentive to virtue. Call to mind the divine benefits, and say with the pious Joseph in Egypt, "How then can I do this wicked thing, and sin against my God?" (Gen. xxxix. 9.)

3. Excite in thyself feelings directly opposed to the temptation, for poison is rendered harmless by antidotes. For instance, thou art tempted by impure feelings; make thy body suffer, in order to stifle them in their origin. If thou art tempted to anger and spite, pray for those who are the occasion of such feelings. Act in like manner

concerning all other evil inclinations. This means is so much the more effective, as it decisively combats self-love.

4. Thou shouldst not consider or acknowledge temptations as chastisements, for by them God incites us to seek refuge and help from Him, to own our own nothingness and to learn what He demands of us. Hence we should look upon temptations as divine favors, and thank God for the opportunity of being able in some things to carry our cross with Jesus Christ, wholly resigned to the divine will. Yea, and even more; we ought sincerely to rejoice over the temptations, according to the counsel of St. James, "Count it all joy, when you shall fall into diverse temptations" (Chap. I., v. 2); and why? because as God said to St. Paul, "Virtue is perfected in infirmity," that is, the more numerous the temptations we have to sustain against a virtue, the more we

become perfect therein, for the constant efforts to overcome them are the best teachers of virtue.

5. Love tenderly the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, and have so unlimited a confidence in her, as to hold it as impossible for her to allow a child of hers to perish in combating sin. In time of temptation flee at once under her mantle, as a pullet seeks refuge under the wings of the hen, and say, for instance: "O Mary, show thyself a Mother to me! O my Lady, I am suffering violence, hasten to my assistance!"

6. Remember the four last things. Impress on thy mind some striking saying concerning each one of them, and recall to mind in temptations at one time the saying concerning death, at another time that concerning judgment, etc. But as the devil may try to prevent thee from remembering any of them when he tempts thee, it will prove

very useful if, when free from temptation, thou often exercisest thyself in recalling those sayings, so as to become accustomed to them.

7. Disclose all thy temptations to thy spiritual father. Such sincerity often produces admirable, yea, even wonderful, effects, on account of the humility practised therein.

8. Humble thyself at once most willingly before God, acknowledging thy sinfulness, and that thou deservest still greater trials, saying, "It is meet, O Lord, that I should suffer this, for it is far less than I have deserved."

CHAPTER XIX.

Mottoes, Maxims, and Resolutions for Frequent Consideration.

1. The religious who does not make progress in perfection goes backward. What was thy object in entering religion? What didst thou then wish?

2. The religious who mingles in things foreign to his duties neglects himself and his duties.

3. A religious cannot serve God without mastering himself.

4. How can a religious die in the Lord, if in life he did not labor for God?

5. Neither speak nor curiously inquire about what concerns thee not.

6. He serves not God who seeks consolation in the religious state.

7. Woe to the religious who is ill-tempered among the pious.

8. He who loves poverty possesses all things. Of worldly things choose the worst, and of heavenly things the best.

9. He is not poor who does not wish to feel the effects of poverty. To have the name of being poor and, at the same time, to enjoy the comforts of wealth is to deceive men.

10. He is not chaste who does not flee the occasions of impurity.

11. He is not obedient who, whilst exteriorly submitting to orders, contradicts, murmurs and criticises.

12. It is better to bear an injury in silence and without murmur than to fast several days till evening.

13. The supposition that in another con-

vent, under another superior, among other companions, in another employment, in other circumstances, one would make greater progress and be better satisfied, has already deceived many. Some in a few years have tried every kind of change consecutively, without becoming better, more happy or more contented. God has placed us where we are; let us remain where we now are until it shall please Him to call us away. Where in the world is there a rose without thorns?

14. A religious should love what worldlings hate.

15. The life and example of the clergy and of religious is life or death to the laity.

16. He does not lead a spiritual life who does not strive to shun venial sin.

17. The devil hunts and attacks vigorously the slothful religious.

18. That religious is not yet dead to the

world, who is greatly concerned about his relatives and friends in the world.

19. The devil plays hand-ball with a vain and unmortified religious.

20. No one is more happy under the sun than the religious who loves God, his superior and his cell.

21. The religious who strives after perfection should willingly and fervently embrace all that is painful, burdensome and disagreeable, all that requires combats, self-restraint and self-denial. He should, indeed, prefer these to all that is agreeable to the sensual man. He should never hearken to the seductive voice of nature, but always follow the inspirations of grace leading to life eternal.

22. Only he who is a slave to his inordinate inclinations and lacks a childlike confidence in God, becomes uneasy and impatient when he meets an obstacle. Thou shalt

live uneasy as long as a single evil inclination or desire reigns in thee, although all the others had already been overcome.

23. He who does not hearken to his superior as to God's representative will not be recognized by God as His child.

24. No one can be crowned in religion until he has lawfully combated.

25. He who wishes to reform others without first reforming himself undertakes a fruitless task.

26. I shall be a true child of my Order as long as I am candid and sincere towards my superior.

27. I will not be ashamed of being looked upon as striving after true devotion and spiritual perfection.

28. I will never bother myself about offices that may be later intrusted to me, but will abandon myself to God's designs, and put my trust in Him alone.

29. I will withdraw myself from creatures and seek God, and I shall surely find Him.

30. I will cling to no creature; I will rely on no one, save on God and my superiors.

31. If I do not become holy whilst I am young, I shall never become so.

32. When my superiors give me a command, I will never inquire wherefore.

33. I will follow the Community and avoid all singularity.

34. I will in all things act in opposition to the maxims of the world.

35. I will hold that spiritual things and the practice of virtue are of greater importance than skill and other natural gifts.

36. If I am not well versed in prayer and meditation, I shall never live tranquilly in my state.

37. I will not be ashamed to put into practice all I learned in the noviciate.

38. I will be as careful of the honor of my Order as any one can be of his own.

39. He who wishes to be a child of Mary and of his Order should preserve his chastity.

40. If the good name of thy Order is dear to thee, observe faithfully its discipline and be devoted to its honor, and when it is time to speak, speak on spiritual subjects.

41. Beware of being a burden and a cross to thy superiors or to any one else, but strive to give pleasure to all.

42. In my Institute I will consider myself as a beggar admitted out of charity; I will look upon as a favor all that is done to me.

43. What doth it avail me to live long in my Order if I do not attain its object and end?

44. In the observance of my rule and the fulfilment of my resolutions, I will pay no heed to what others may say.

45. I will at all times walk in the strait way, without heeding what others may say.

46. It is easier to engage in spiritual discourse with a few than with many; but we should not do this with always the same companions, but at one time with one, and at another time with some one else.

47. When I commit a fault deserving of punishment, I will humbly ask for a penance.

48. I will choose a day in every month on which to read over my resolutions and renew myself in spirit.

49. I will go every week to my superior to give an account of three things: whether I kept silence, whether I discoursed on spiritual subjects, whether I have kept my resolutions.

50. I will rather let my health suffer than wilfully transgress, or fail to keep without dispensation, a constitution or a rule.

51. I will endeavor to consider God in the person of all my superiors.

52. I will be faithful especially in spiritual things: *e.g.*, in making meditation, the examinations of conscience, spiritual reading.

53. I will not be ashamed to avail myself of every occasion to speak on spiritual subjects, and for this I will willingly go with the simple and the less refined.

54. In the convent I am not the master, but the servant of all, and in this should my honor and glory consist. For how should I wish to rule, since Jesus Christ came, not to be served, but to serve us, and the Blessed Virgin called herself only the handmaid of the Lord.

55. Why, O my soul, dost thou do what thou shalt later repent of in thy cell?

56. If thou wishest to know whether thou lovest thy vocation, examine whether thou lovest mortification. Thy vocation is

to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, and how canst thou be His disciple, if thou dost not wish to be crucified with Him?

57. I will spare no effort to maintain a constant peace and interior joy.

58. The renunciation of self-love is a mortification, by virtue of which thou actest, not as thou likest either interiorly or exteriorly, but only according to the good pleasure of God and of thy superiors.

59. Obedience consists in the union of our will with the divine will, and in performing what God inspires us to do.

60. There is hardly a rule without exception; but this one has none, "Nothing is comparable to God."

61. The world is nothing to him to whom God is everything.

62. The time misspent during prayer is taken away from God.

63. We offer sufficient atonement for our

sins, if we perform all our actions with the intention of pleasing God; in this there is great perfection.

64. The great progress of the soul in virtue consists not in thinking much on God, but in loving Him much.

65. Blessed is he who loves without desiring to be loved; blessed is he who serves and does not desire to be served.

66. He who wishes to enjoy peace and tranquillity should hold everybody else to be better and more pleasing to God than himself.

67. Meekness is a sure sign of innocence kept or recovered.

68. Those who are devoted to piety and frequent the sacraments, but do not perform the works of faith and charity, are like trees in blossom, which are expected to produce as many fruits as they have blossoms; but what happens?

69. In order to be humble not in word only, but in heart also, it does not suffice to assert that we deserve contempt; no, but we should rejoice also when others despise us. Thou art not yet humble, if thou dost not patiently bear disdain and contempt.

70. God imposes the greatest trials on those He loves most.

71. He who endeavors to lighten the Lord's yoke, renders it only the heavier; and he who tries to make it heavier, renders it only the lighter.

72. Precipitateness and restlessness do not contribute to the success of a good work. To desire its success is good, but it should be without anxiety.

73. God occupies Himself with me, as if I were alone in the world. It is also meet that I should occupy myself with Him, as if besides Him there were nobody and nothing in the universe.

74. Meditate often on the passion of Jesus Christ, thy King. He endured torments only to win thee and thy heart.

75. Be truly humble, and thou wilt never think that any injustice is done to thee.

76. Do not imagine that thou hast made any progress in perfection, if thou dost not consider thyself the least of all.

77. He has only the appearance of humility who, though he humbles himself, cannot bear to be humbled by others.

78. To be humble and devoid of merit is a necessity. To be humble and possessed of some merit is praiseworthy. But to be humble whilst possessing great merits is true and genuine humility.

79. If thou wishest to learn and know something very useful, learn and love to be unknown and to be considered as nothing.

80. He who attentively considers his sins and faults, and what he was and is before

God, looks upon human praise as scorn and mockery.

81. On the feasts of the saints meditate on their virtues, and beseech God to impart them to thee.

82. The most secure and ordinary road to holiness is that of suffering.

83. When thou crossest a street, reflect that thou art not a painter nor a teacher of drawing.

84. What thou dost not want God to see, do not do; think not what thou dost not want Him to know, nor say what thou dost not wish Him to hear.

85. A true servant of Jesus Christ suffers patiently, speaks little, works much for Jesus Christ, and considers it a great gain if, without any fault on his part, he has to suffer something.

86. We complain of our sufferings; we should have greater reason to complain, had

we nothing to suffer, for nothing renders us more like Jesus Christ than to carry our cross.

87. Do not complain of pains, sufferings, and adversity before casting a glance at thy crucifix and thinking on the twofold eternity.

88. He makes the greatest progress in religious life and virtue who manfully strives to overcome whatever he finds most difficult and disagreeable.

89. Incense emits no odor nor ascends upward, unless it burns; and it is in suffering that we prove our love of God and our fidelity to Him.

90. The road to the Mount of Olives is steep indeed; but the Mount of Olives is also the Mount of the Ascension. Those who suffer with Jesus Christ will be also glorified with Him.

91. Suffer with Jesus Christ, for Jesus

Christ, and for the love of Jesus Christ. Christ wished to suffer and to be despised; and thou wouldst yet complain!

92. Do not divide thy heart, giving one part to God and the other to the world. Thou canst not serve two masters. Moreover, such a division would be unfair and unjust, since God justly demands and deserves thy whole heart.

93. When we have once so far progressed as no longer to seek any human consolation, we then begin to relish spiritual and heavenly things.

94. We should not imagine we are able to please everybody.

95. We should expect a just return, not from men, but from God alone.

96. We should observe in our neighbor only his virtues and advantages, and in ourselves only our faults and imperfections.

97. He who severely judges his own

deeds, finds no reason to condemn others, but is inclined rather to excuse them.

98. Do not easily excuse thyself; of thyself say nothing praiseworthy, nothing derogatory; the former is vanity, and the latter seldom sincere.

99. Set thy hands to work, and turn thy eyes towards the grave, towards heaven and God.

100. If thou wishest to live in great tranquillity and true peace, thy most ardent desires should be to see God in the next life, thy greatest fear to lose Him, thy most bitter pain not yet to enjoy Him, and thy greatest joy all that can lead thee to Him.

101. Free thy heart from all that is created and seek God alone, and thou shalt find Him.

102. Severity towards ourselves should render us more meek, indulgent and affable towards others. The most wicked are the

severest judges of the conduct of their fellow-men; this arises from malice, or hypocrisy, or a false zeal. We naturally judge of others by ourselves.

103. If our neighbor's act has one hundred sides, we should always look at it from its most favorable side. When the sinfulness of an act no longer admits of vindication, we should at least seek to excuse it and admit that the intention was good. But if this is impossible, we should at least make allowance for the violence of the temptation, for the ignorance, impulsiveness or human frailty of the one who committed the fault.

104. The evil-doer cannot condone his own fault in others; he sees it clearly enough to blame it in others; but he is blind to it in himself and too weak to extirpate it.

105. Great wisdom and well-grounded

humility consist in having a low opinion of one's self and a good and exalted opinion of others.

106. We should flee nothing more carefully than sloth, sadness and dangerous familiarities.

107. To bear cheerfully, gratefully and lovingly the daily little inconveniences that are inseparable from our vocation, is a constant and most profitable exercise of mortification.

108. We cannot live on earth without adversity. If we possess interior peace, we meet with exterior trouble. If we have nothing to suffer externally, our interior is a prey to sadness, discouragement and anxiety. If God consoles us, the evil spirit in a rage harasses us with temptations. If the devil does not molest us, God withdraws His light and consolation from us. And when there is nothing else to

disturb us, we give ourselves no rest and are troubled by our own fancies.

109. Do not fear God if thou canst love Him; but that thou mayst love Him, fear Him.

110. He who seeks to attain interior quiet and recollection should so conduct himself, as if he had no eyes to see, no ears to hear. Whatever God has not prescribed to him, he should consider as no concern of his. He should especially avoid occupying himself with the actions, the manners, the conduct, the faults and imperfections of others.

111. He who performs more than he ought, performs less than he ought.

112. I will consider and employ each day as if it were my last; one day shall surely be my last; but which one?

113. On judgment day we shall not be asked what we have read and spoken, but

what we have done; not how beautifully we have spoken, but how piously and purely we have lived.

114. Attend to thyself. What others do is no concern of thine. Follow Jesus Christ.

115. Thou art as great and as good as thou art before God; neither more nor less.

116. Beware lest, on account of thy negligence, God take away from thee the tenderness of thy conscience, and leave it insensible in thee.

117. Nothing is more precious than the love wherewith thou mayst purchase heaven. It is the greatest waste and folly to love what is transitory, or even sinful.

118. Shun what displeases thee in others, but imitate what pleases thee in them.

119. It profiteth me nothing to gain the whole world at the risk of my soul.

120. Thy spiritual progress is in proportion to thy self-denial.

121. Act like a tender mother towards others, but like a severe judge towards thyself.

122. "Never omit to overcome thyself at any cost. Keep thy passions under restraint, and often choose what is most opposed to sensuality. Above all, overcome thy natural ambition, and do this unsparingly. Do not rest or quit until thou hast rooted out of thy heart all pride, and not only willingly suffer thyself to be placed below every one, but also rejoice at the contempt shown thee; for rest assured that, without this humility and self-denial, thou canst neither make any progress in virtue nor prove useful to thy neighbor and pleasing to God" (St. Francis Xavier).

123. I will often and unceasingly have recourse, in all humility and unlimited confidence, to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the source of all graces and the model of all

virtues, and also to the immaculate and loving heart of Mary, through whom chiefly all heavenly blessings flow to us.

124. With the utmost fervor I will venerate the Most Blessed Sacrament, the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, and my guardian angel.

125. I will often during the day raise my heart to God by short and fervent aspirations and the renewal of a pure intention.

126. I will most carefully abstain from judging others and mingling in their concerns. What I cannot excuse I will compassionate, considering my own weakness and sinfulness, and saying a Hail Mary for the amendment of the culprit.

127. I will always speak to every one in a friendly, respectful and humble manner.

128. There rained no manna so long as the flour from Egypt lasted; that is, God

gives us no interior consolations, unless we mortify our flesh.

129. Those who wish to do what they ought not, shall have to do later what they wish not.

130. When Jesus Christ withdraws from me and leaves me without consolation, I will not allow my heart to be disturbed, for He will come again. But I will constantly look for Him, and when the world or the flesh assails me, I will exclaim: "Lord, whither shall I go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

131. He who is or, at least, strives to become perfect, rejoices over that which causes displeasure, vexation and sadness to the tepid and imperfect.

132. My soul, what doth it profit thee to be loved by men, if, like Pilate, thou losest the friendship of Jesus Christ on account of that love?

133. Our Lord Jesus Christ, though aware of the excessive weakness of His body, nevertheless took up the cross; and thou, my soul, through pusillanimity, refusest to take up the prescriptions of obedience. Simon of Cyrene helped Jesus Christ to carry His cross, and Jesus Christ Himself will help thee to carry thine, if only, for His sake, thou courageously takest it up.

134. Jesus Christ, the world, Satan and the flesh are seeking me; but none of them can find me, unless I will it. If the world, Satan and the flesh find me, they will, like famished lions, devour me. Jesus Christ alone will make me happy, if He finds me. O sweetest Jesus, I will that Thou shouldst find and possess me. If Thou findest me, I shall find Thee and this will suffice for me.

135. If thou canst not meditate on sublime mysteries, reflect on the passion of

Jesus Christ, and rest willingly in His sacred wounds.

136. He who diligently considers our Lord's life and passion will find in abundance therein all that is useful and necessary for his spiritual life.

137. I will carefully consider what I have to do, and not what others are doing.

138. Accustom thyself to excuse others out of true charity, and to be thoughtful of their welfare in all things.

139. Why dost thou wish to see that which has no value in thy eyes? Modesty of the eyes preserves from many sins and is the mother of piety.

140. The best means of acquiring self-mastery is to renounce thy judgment and thy self-will. "Let him that wishes to follow Me," says Christ, "deny himself."

141. The renunciation of one's judgment consists in the mortification of every

opinion that accords not with the divine will and the judgment of reasonable men.

142. He that does not highly esteem prayer, cannot long remain in the spiritual road. Prayer is opposed to Satan; hence he does all he can to prevent it.

143. Self-contempt is the shortest way to perfection and the beginning of great peace of mind.

144. Be but little and be small in thy own eyes, and desire to be also thus considered; and when thou art so treated, be not sad, but rejoice.

CHAPTER XX.

The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(Chiefly from St. Alphonsus.)

1. "The lover of souls, our most loving Redeemer," says St. Alphonsus, "declared that He had no other motive in coming down upon earth to become man than to enkindle in the hearts of men the fire of His holy love, 'I am come to cast fire on earth and what will I but that it be kindled'" (Luke xxii. 49). And, oh, what beautiful flames of love has He not enkindled in so many souls, especially by the torments He chose to suffer in His death, that He might prove to us His immeasurable love for us! And how many souls, happy in the wounds

of Jesus, as in glowing furnaces of love, have been so inflamed with His love, that they have willingly consecrated to Him their goods, their lives, their whole selves, courageously surmounting all the difficulties which they had to encounter. St. Augustine, all inflamed with love at the sight of Jesus nailed on the cross, prayed thus sweetly, "Imprint, O Lord, Thy wounds in my heart, that I may read therein suffering and love; suffering, that I may endure for Thee all suffering, and love, that for Thee I may despise all love."

2. And from what source did the saints draw courage and strength to suffer torments, martyrdom and death, if not from the sufferings of Jesus crucified? "When we raise our eyes to contemplate Jesus on the cross," says St. Teresa, "we perceive how insignificant are all our sufferings. He who thinks on the Redeemer's wounds and

recalls the torments He endured, will not dare to complain of his own little trials, for our sufferings can bear no comparison with His." "Think often on Jesus crucified," says St. Francis de Sales; "consider Him covered with wounds, filled with sadness, despoiled of everything, and loaded with curses, and you will acknowledge that your sufferings can bear no comparison with His." Who, then, can ever complain that he suffers wrongfully, when He considers Jesus, who was bruised for our sins? Who can refuse to obey, on account of some inconvenience, when Jesus became obedient even unto death? Who can refuse ignominies, when they behold Jesus treated as a fool, as a mock King, as a criminal, as an impostor, struck, spit upon on His face, and suspended from an infamous gibbet?

3. Who can love any other object than Jesus, when they see Him dying in the

midst of so many and so great sufferings and insults, in order to win our love? Father Balthasar Alvarez, S.J., was wont to exhort his penitents to meditate frequently on the Passion of our Redeemer, saying that they should not consider that they had done anything at all, until they were able to retain Jesus crucified continually present in their hearts. "He who desires," says St. Bonaventure, "to go on advancing from virtue to virtue, from grace to grace, should constantly meditate on the Passion of Jesus Christ. There is no exercise more profitable for the entire sanctification of the soul than the frequent meditation of the sufferings of Jesus Christ."

4. Our Saviour suffered so much, that He might urge us to think on His sufferings; because, if we think of them, we cannot but be inflamed with divine love. So few persons love Jesus Christ, because

so few consider what He has deigned to suffer for us. He that frequently reflects on this cannot live without loving Jesus Christ, for, as St. Paul says, "the charity of Christ presseth us" (2 Cor. v. 14). Such a one will feel himself so constrained by the Saviour's ineffable love for him, that he will not possibly be able to refrain from loving a God so full of love, who has suffered so much to win our love. Hence, the apostle of the Gentiles said, that he desired to know nothing but Jesus, and Jesus crucified, "I judged not myself to know anything among you but Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Cor. ii. 2). All the saints have learned the art of loving God from the study of the crucifix. St. Francis of Assisi found no subject on which he exhorted his brethren with greater eagerness than the constant remembrance of the Passion of Jesus.

5. Jesus crucified is the book we should constantly read. It will teach us, on the one hand, to fear sin above every evil, and, on the other hand, it will inflame us with love for a God so full of love for us. "As for myself," continues St. Alphonsus, "I can never be satiated with meditating on the Passion of our divine Redeemer. In this subject I find everything. To meditate well on it teaches the perfect observance of the vows and rules, the love of contempt and of the trials that are inseparable from the religious life. He will never effect much, who does not carry Jesus Christ crucified in his heart. He who keeps his Redeemer in view, cannot but love Him truly." Jesus Christ crucified should be our love, our life, our treasure, our all. Our hearts should be constantly attached to His sacred feet, so that we may be able to say with St. Paul:

"With Christ I am nailed to the cross; and I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me. . . . I live in the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and delivered Himself up for me" (Gal. ii. 19, 20).

CHAPTER XXI.

Meditations on the Sorrowful Passion of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and Pious Exterior and Interior Exercises for Every Day in the Month.

Day of the Month.	Mysteries of Christ's Passion.	Exterior Exercises.	Interior Exercises.
1	Jesus takes leave of His Mother.	Not to complain to any one about one's sufferings, and not to seek human consolation.	I wish for nothing besides Thee, O my Lord and God.
2	Jesus washes the feet of His disciples.	To assume the meaner occupations.	O Lord, wash and cleanse my impure heart.
3	Jesus Christ institutes the sacrament of the Blessed Eucharist.	Often make a spiritual Communion during the day, and at meals perform some little mortification.	O Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof.
4	Jesus gives His last admonitions to His Apostles before His passion.	Not to speak unnecessarily during the day, and be so much the more attentive to the divine inspirations.	Speak, O Lord, for Thy servant heareth.

Day of the Month.	Mysteries of Christ's Passion.	Exterior Exercises.	Interior Exercises.
5	Jesus prays in the Garden of Olives and sweats blood for our salvation.	Fervently hasten to the prescribed exercises of devotion.	Lord, not my will, but Thine be done!
6	Jesus is betrayed by Judas with a kiss.	Act in a friendly manner towards those who are disagreeable and opposed to us.	Who will grant, O Life of my soul, that I may die for Thee?
7	Jesus is arrested and bound like a criminal.	To deny our own will.	O my Jesus, like a lamb Thou didst not open Thy mouth.
8	Jesus is led to Annas.	Perform at once the good resolved upon or commanded.	Thou, O God, art my strength; in Thee I can do all things.
9	Jesus receives a blow on the cheek from a servant.	Not to excuse ourselves, when, though innocent, we are blamed or punished.	O Lord, I am only what I am before Thee, neither better nor worse.
10	Jesus is thrice denied by Peter.	To complain of no one.	Behold me, O Lord, have mercy on me.
11	Jesus is mocked all night long, and is badly treated and tormented.	To mortify ourselves on all occasions without attracting observation.	O my Jesus, Thou canst now say, I am a worm, and not a man.
12	Jesus is brought to Pilate at early morn.	To address our neighbor in a friendly manner.	O Lord, I offer myself to Thee as a constant holocaust of Thy love.

Day of the Month.	Mysteries of Christ's Passion.	Exterior Exercises.	Interior Exercises.
13	Jesus is led bound to Herod.	Neither do nor neglect anything good out of human respect.	O my Jesus, the more Thou allowest Thyself to be despised, the more I love Thee.
14	Jesus Christ, the eternal Wisdom, is clothed in a white garment and mocked.	To say or do something that may draw contempt on us.	O my dearest Spouse, I will rather be despised with Thee, than be honored without Thee.
15	Jesus is brought back in great disgrace from Herod to Pilate.	Constantly to preserve holy patience amid crosses and trials.	My kingdom is not of this world.
16	Barabbas, the robber, is preferred to Jesus, the chief Good.	To say nothing in our own praise.	O dearest Jesus, my God and my all.
17	Jesus is most cruelly scourged.	Carefully to restrain our eyes in honor of Jesus stripped.	O Lord, is it possible for me to see Thee in such torments, and not to melt into tears?
18	Jesus Christ, the King of heaven and earth, is crowned with thorns.	On this day especially let us yield to our neighbor in all things lawful.	O my Jesus, it was I, who by my pride, placed this crown of thorns on Thy head.
19	Jesus is shown in this lamentable state to the people.	Neither desire to please men, nor fear to displease them.	My Lord and my God, in possessing Thee I possess all things.

Day of the Month.	Mysteries of Christ's Passion.	Exterior Exercises.	Interior Exercises.
20	Jesus is unjustly condemned to death.	To explain everything in favor of our neighbor.	O Lord, I have deserved death.
21	Jesus carries His heavy cross.	In honor of Jesus carrying His cross to assist others in their hard work.	My Lord, grant me the grace to suffer something for Thy sake.
22	Jesus, carrying His cross, meets His sorrowful Mother.	To practise some devotion in honor of the Mother of God, and to console the afflicted.	O dearest Mother, assist me in every trial, anguish, and want.
23	At the end of the Way of the cross Jesus is allowed neither refreshment nor rest.	Not to eat out of meal time, not to sit down without necessity, if fatigued.	O my Jesus, for Thy sake change for me all earthly sweetness into bitterness.
24	Jesus is stripped of His clothes shamefully and amid great suffering.	To suffer patiently the inclemencies of the weather.	Forgive me, O my Saviour, for having so delicately treated my body.
25	Jesus is nailed to the cross.	Not to lean on anything when seated, or — when not observed — to pray with outstretched arms.	O Lord, suffer not Thy great pains to be in vain for me.
26	Jesus, fearfully insulted and reviled, prays for His enemies.	Most willingly to return good for injuries received.	O Lord, how much more hast Thou forgiven me, than I have forgiven my neighbor!

Day of the Month.	Mysteries of Christ's Passion.	Exterior Exercises.	Interior Exercises.
27	Jesus cries out, I thirst; and is given gall and vinegar to drink.	Not to drink out of meals.	May the Blood of Jesus Christ be given me to drink and to cleanse me from my sins.
28	Jesus amid great torments gives up His soul.	To obey perfectly even in difficult matters.	O Jesus, to Thee I live; O Jesus, to Thee I die; O Jesus, Thine am I in life and death!
29	The Sacred Heart of Jesus is pierced with a lance.	To exercise hearty and benevolent charity towards our neighbor.	With the darts of Thy love, O Lord, wound my heart, and remain my portion forever.
30	Jesus is taken down from the cross and placed in the sepulchre.	Strive to practise poverty perfectly.	O my only Good, I willingly embrace holy poverty, since, for my sake, Thou didst become the poorest of all.
31	Mary, the Mother of sorrows, is constant in suffering, and perfectly conformed to God's holy will.	Strive to practise true self-denial, and accept all things with a holy indifference from the hands of God.	Holy Mother, impress thy sufferings deeply in our hearts.

CHAPTER XXII.

The Blessed Virgin Mary.

"Behold thy Son. . . . Behold thy Mother" (John xix. 27). These were the last words that Jesus Christ addressed to any creature before His death, they are His last will. By them He intrusted all His disciples to His own beloved Mother as her spiritual children, and gave her to all His disciples as their spiritual Mother. These words have a special reference to religious, who are represented by St. John, the beloved disciple of our Saviour. He was a virginal soul, who had left all things for Christ's sake. Religious vow and practise chastity, have left all things for Christ's

sake, and have become His beloved spouses. No one else, then, has a greater claim to Mary as a Mother.

Religious may then say, Mary, in fact, has been truly our Mother, and the most tender of mothers, for we may, indeed, say, "All good things came to me together with her, and innumerable riches through her hands, for she is an infinite treasure to men; which they that use, become the friends of God" (Wisd. vii. 11, 13). We owe everything to Mary. It is through her that we received all the graces bestowed on us whilst we were in the world, and particularly the inestimable grace of our vocation. How many times did she not preserve us from danger, how many times did she not obtain for us victory over the allurements and temptations of the world! It was she who obtained for us the strength and heroism requisite to leave the

world, to renounce its pleasures, to give up our own will. We can easily remember how she helped us when we invoked her, how she consoled and encouraged us in our trials. But what favors has she not conferred on us since the day on which we were consecrated and espoused to her divine Son! Has she not, so to speak, spoiled us by her kindness? Without her help we could never have practised the virtues required of religious — humility, self-denial, obedience, meekness and charity. Without her we could not have overcome our many temptations, borne our numerous little trials. We could not have persevered until now in our holy vocation, had we not been assisted by the Mother of perseverance. How kind and loving has she not been to us in all our wants! Never did she refuse us a favor. And how many benefits has she not conferred

on us without our being aware of them! Had it not been for her tender maternal solicitude for us, to how many dangerous and violent temptations should we not have been exposed, and how deeply should we not perhaps have fallen! And had we been more loving and devoted children to her, had we more promptly invoked her, more fervently prayed to her, and more faithfully honored her, we should not have committed so many faults, or be now so full of imperfections and so devoid of virtue.

We claim Mary as our Mother, and boast of being her children. But to be truly her children, we should bear some resemblance to her. As she is our spiritual Mother, her spiritual features, that is, her virtues, should be delineated in us, should be visible in our conduct. In the first place, we should resemble her in humility. Although she

was the holiest and most perfect and most exalted of creatures, she excelled all in humility. By her virginity, says the Church, Mary pleased God; but it was by her humility that she conceived the Son of God. "Without humility," says St. Bernard, "even Mary's spotless virginity would not have saved her." "Humility," says St. Teresa, "drew the Son of God from heaven into the womb of a virgin; and it is only by a similar humility that we can draw Him into our souls."

Secondly, Mary distinguished herself by her love of silence, recollection, retirement and prayer. Her union with God was constant and uninterrupted. Prayer was the food of her soul; it was a second nature to her. Let us strive to imitate her in this, and especially in making our daily meditation well.—Thirdly, Mary was a model of obedience. Let us consider our rules as the

will of God towards us, and look upon the orders of our superiors as the orders of God Himself. — Fourthly, Mary was all aglow with divine love, and zealous for the salvation of mankind. Let us love no one but God, and allow in our heart no affection unless it be for God or in God, and, at the same time, let us be ready to sacrifice ourselves for the welfare and salvation of our neighbor in so far as obedience permits. — In fine, Mary is the Queen of Martyrs, the Mother of Sorrows, for next to Jesus, no one ever suffered so much and so willingly and patiently as Mary. Let us, like her, accept all sufferings, all trials and crosses, with patience and resignation, as sent to us by God out of love for us.

Let us ask Mary, our Mother, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, the Mother of Mercy, the Mother of Perseverance, to help us faithfully to keep our good resolutions, to

help us to imitate her virtues. Let us entreat her, by the love she bears to our Spouse Jesus, by the love she bears to us her children, to help us to resemble her, to become her true and worthy children. She who is the most loving of mothers cannot refuse a prayer so pleasing to her — a prayer which she can easily grant us, for she is all-powerful with her divine Son. He cannot refuse anything to her who bore Him, whom He loved, honored and obeyed on earth as His Mother, and whom He has exalted in heaven above all creatures. Let us in all our sorrows, in all our trials and sufferings, and especially in all our temptations and dangers, have recourse to her with the utmost fervor, love and confidence, for she, the most powerful and tender of mothers, will obtain for us all we ask through her. "In all your wants," says the holy Redemptorist, Blessed Clement Maria Hofbauer,

"turn to the Blessed Virgin. She is the Mother of Mercy, and will obtain mercy for you from her Son. Never has the Son refused His Mother a grace, for He cannot turn away a prayer of His Mother. She has found, and always will find, grace with God." "He who remembers," says St. Alphonsus, "having, in temptations against chastity, invoked the name of Mary, may rest assured of not having given consent to them."

We should daily honor Mary in a special manner, and pray much and often to her. We can never honor her too much, whom God has so greatly honored. We ought, moreover, to do all in our power to inspire others with devotion to her, with a tender love for her and an unlimited confidence in her intercession. We ought to consider our devotion to Mary as our protection, as the surest means of salvation and sanctification, and as a pledge of life everlasting,

because she never forsakes those who are devout to her. "The devotions we practise in honor of the glorious Virgin Mary," says St. Teresa, "however little in themselves, are very pleasing to her divine Son, for He rewards them with eternal glory." "If you persevere until death," says St. Alphonsus, "in true devotion to Mary, your salvation is assured."

Let us heed the beautiful exhortation of St. Bernard, that great servant of Mary. "O thou who feelest thyself tempest-tossed amid the shoals of this world, turn not away thine eyes from the Star of the sea, if thou wouldst avoid shipwreck. If the winds of temptation blow furiously, if tribulations rise up like rocks before thee, cast a look at the Star, heave a sigh to Mary. If the waves of pride, ambition, calumny, jealousy, seek to swallow up thy soul, turn thine eyes towards the Star, breathe a prayer

to Mary. If anger, love of pleasure, threaten thy frail bark, seek the protecting look of Mary. If horror for thine own sins, remorse of conscience, dread of the divine judgments, overwhelm thee with sadness and seek to plunge thee into the abyss of despair, cling closely to Mary. In thy dangers, in thy anguish, in thy doubts, think of Mary, call on Mary. Let the sweet name of Mary be on thy lips, in thy heart, and, whilst seeking the aid of her prayers, lose not sight of the example of her virtues. So long as thou followest her, thou canst not go astray. So long as thou invokest her, thou canst not be without hope. As long as thou thinkest on her, thou wilt remain in the right path. So long as she sustains thee, thou canst not fall. So long as she protects thee, thou hast nothing to fear. If she favor thy voyage, thou wilt safely reach the harbor of salvation."

CONSECRATION TO MARY, OUR MOTHER.

O most holy and immaculate Virgin Mary, the Mother of Jesus, my beloved Spouse, I now again choose thee as my own Mother. Henceforth I will never cease to love, cherish and venerate thee as my own beloved Mother all the days of my life. To thee will I have recourse in all my trials, sufferings and temptations, and I shall do my best to induce others to love and venerate thee, and to invoke thee in all their wants. O Mary, deign to accept me as thine own most loving child, and make me faithful to thee. Make me, like thee, humble, meek, patient, charitable, pure, obedient and docile to my rules and superiors. Deign to obtain for me an unwavering love for my Spouse Jesus, and a holy and well-regulated zeal for the salvation of souls. O Mary, my dearest Mother, do not forsake me, thy

child, when I am assailed by temptation; hasten then at once to my assistance, and do not permit me ever to prove untrue to my beloved Jesus. Enable me, by thy all-powerful help, to become, through a constant growth in virtue and holiness, daily more and more pleasing to Jesus, my heavenly Spouse, and to persevere until death in the love of Him and of thee, my most tender and beloved Mother Mary. Amen.

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Helps to a Spiritual Life.
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